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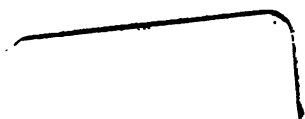
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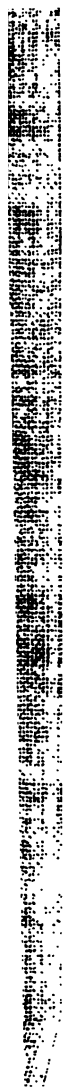
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S O I M Ê M E

A Story of a ~~Useful~~ Life

By

Mrs. Matilda Leathes.

*Lord, mend or rather make us: one creation
Will not suffice our turn
Except Thou make us daily, we shall spurn
Our own salvation.*

George Herbert.

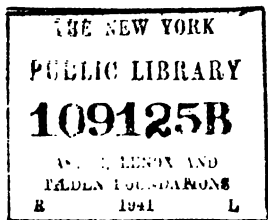
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P R E F A C E

TO write of "oneself" may seem a vain thing, but each of us has a story to tell ; and every story of a life, honestly told, may teach some lesson to another.

I have told mine ; and, though, I fear, to the end of time few will learn from the experience of others, yet some of the more humble-minded may do so.

It has seemed to me, too, as I look around upon my younger friends, with the knowledge which years and suffering have given me, that I can see much wilfulness even in the least self-indulgent among them ; and I

cannot be silent when I know that it was on this rock that my life was wrecked.

Yet not wrecked, though ; for even out of this evil the Father's hand has brought good—but saddened ; for, when I look back on the past, I feel truly that I must, for my self-will, go softly all the days of my life.

M. G.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
My Home—My New Friends—Bell's Story—My Mother's Death—Simon Buttermen	I

CHAPTER II.

Self-Consciousness—My Secret Trial—Our Scheme — Its Progress — Disastrous Ending — James's Recovery	12
---	----

CHAPTER III.

The Eagle's Nest—The Red Bargeman—The Island in the River—We are Prisoners—Lost on the Morfe — Consternation at Home — The Fiery Comet	24
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

Bell's Taste — A Disclosure — James's Wisdom — Honest Nathan — Relics of my Mother — Re-	
---	--

fractory—A Happier Home—Envy and Rebellion —A Hopeless Task—A Blind Prayer	PAGE 38
CHAPTER V.	
Lady Willoughby—A Strange Introduction—Sunshine in the House—My Father's Anger—Miserable Hours—A Happy Walk—The Daily Cross— Wilful Self-Devotion—A Story of Love—My New Dress	58
CHAPTER VI.	
Great Changes—Rose comes Home—The Rose— More Rebellion—My Father's Warning—Self- Pity—Imaginary Saintliness—My Stepmother's Trials	80
CHAPTER VII.	
Self-Imposed Solitude—An Explanation—I find a Sister—Rose's Secret	96
CHAPTER VIII.	
Some Mischief still—My Stepmother's Proposal— Uselessness—Goodness Dull—Rose's History	107
CHAPTER IX.	
My Reception at Rotherham—Mrs Campbell—The Faithful Sarah	119

CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER X.

	PAGE
Our Drives—The Grass of Parnassus—Sarah's Story	
—True Self-Devotion	126

CHAPTER XI.

Dulness and Goodness—The Tone of a Life—Our New Neighbours—Gossip—French Refugees— Mrs Campbell's One Fault	135
---	-----

CHAPTER XII.

Our Visit—My New Friends—Josephine and Emily— A Day in the Woods—Simple Pleasures—A Worm at the Root—My Confession—True Names —Out of Temptation	148
---	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

The Golden Bowl Broken—My Illness—A Great Trial—The Fire—Confusion—Our Enemy— More Trouble	167
--	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

Trials of Patience—An Advertisement—A Warning —Ash-Wednesday—A Homely Breakfast—An Unpleasant Position—Lost in the Dark	182
---	-----

CHAPTER XV.

A Rough Reception—A Dreary Waking—A Cold Welcome—Discouragement—Work to do	197
---	-----

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XVI.

	PAGE
A Rude Lodging—The New Church—Madeline—An Unwelcome Visitor—News from Home—Bitter Experience	208

CHAPTER XVII.

At Home again—Passing away	220
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

Bowing to the Yoke—Forgiven	224
---------------------------------------	-----

SOI MÉME

CHAPTER I.

[WAS just fourteen—yes—just fourteen, and James was twelve and a half—when we became conscious (for I think both of us awakened to the fact about the same time) that we were unlike other people.

I was sitting with my feet hanging out of the play-room window, plaiting rushes, which James brought me rank and green from the big pond in the garden, as the thought matured. And as he returned from one of his journeys, very triumphant, with a bundle of jointed rushes, I said, “James, what a dreadful state the garden is in!”

“Is it?” he said. “So it is; I never noticed it before.”

“Why, the walks can scarcely be seen for

weeds, and Dick feeds where the lawn ought to be!"

James sat down at my feet and looked grave.

"Didn't you see how different the Rectory garden looked to-day?"

"Yes, I did," said James, moodily.

"Well, James, don't you think if we set to work, we might get ours into order by the time papa comes back. Wouldn't it surprise him?"

"Suppose we do," said James, in the same dreamy way, as if overcome with a rush of new ideas—"that is, if old Nathan will let us."

"Oh, we must get up very early in the morning, and do it while he is in the stables and kitchen-garden. But then, again, James," I said, "the servants don't treat us properly!"

"No, indeed," said James; "they seem to think we are babies still."

"I shall speak to papa about it; really old Bell is unbearable!"

"But, Mildred, papa will never send them away?"

"Oh, I don't want that," I said, for I love

old Bell at heart ; "but he might tell them to treat us like young gentlemen and ladies, and to show us a little more respect." I did not add that my ears were tingling then with a sharp box from old Bell, or nurse, as we called her, save when she had offended us. I believe I had deserved it ; for I had discovered three mice in a trap in the nursery cupboard, and had liberated the little soft darlings, which had made nurse very angry, for she said "they had been the plague of her life for the last six weeks, and this was the first time they had taken to the trap, and now no power on earth'll get them in again !"

"Not if they're wise," I replied ; whereupon followed the box in the ear, which sent me off to fume in the play-room, and which had brought to an eruption the discontented feelings, which had been at work in my mind for the last few weeks.

We lived in a lone, large, rambling house, called the "Morfe." It was little more than a bettermost kind of farm-house, although there were good rooms in it. The entrance-hall was very large and high, and from it sprang a handsome flight of carved old oak

stairs, leading to a gallery which ran all round, and from which the bed-rooms opened. In the hall, in a deep recess, was a great fireplace. There was a seat in each chimney corner, and in the winter a large wood fire was kept burning on the hearth, and it was by it James and I spent most of our long evenings, James lying on the bear-skin before the fire, and I in one of the snug corners; both with our books. I associate to this day the "Tales of the Castle," and "Evenings at Home," with the big hall at the Morfe.

The house was surrounded by about one hundred acres of land, which my father was supposed to farm. It was as lonely a place as could well be found. The Morfe was a large common, extending some two or three miles on either side of us. We had no neighbours, excepting some farmers at the Little Morfe Farm, about half a mile from us, and our nearest town was a very small one, rather more than three miles distant. It was a visit to the clergyman's family at Brude we had been making that morning, and it was the neat and well-kept garden and orderly household arrangements, which had made so great

an impression on me. There had been a change there lately, in consequence of the death of the old rector, who had been a great friend of my father's, but who had let things run to ruin, much as they did at the Morfe. Now the new one, Mr Mabberley, had made great changes, and the place was enlivened by a large family of children.

I had felt too that morning that my dress appeared odd and old-fashioned, by the side of Emily and Marion Mabberley's, which was neater and prettier, and I was also conscious of an awkward and ungainly manner. No wonder ; for we had scarcely ever before seen any one, excepting some old friend of my father's. Young companions we had never had.

So I came back out of humour with everything and everybody ; and above all with poor Mrs Bell, who had the choice of all my frocks, as they were called till I was grown up ; and who cut out and made them by some wonderful economical pattern, which was more frugal than becoming.

However, I was not one easily to be depressed or discouraged. Difficulties only roused my spirit and determination, and I

never rested till I had overcome them. The first step to improvement was the garden, and as James and I said good night that evening, while Bell was waiting with the candle to go with me to my room, I whispered in his ear—"Mind—five o'clock—come under my window."

James always said that I originated, and he carried out, and there was some truth in it. I believe I had by far the busiest brain, but he had more executive power, and more common sense resources. We were very fond of each other, James and I.

My father had been brought up to the bar, but his health had failed early in life, and I believe also he did not heartily like his profession, so he left it and settled down upon the small property he inherited from his father. I believe he was born to great expectations, but at his father's death the property was found to be encumbered so heavily, that but little remained for him and an only sister. All I knew I heard from old Bell; for my father was so reserved he seldom conversed with us, and when he did, it was only about our books, or our lessons, our dogs, or our other animals.


He never took us into his confidence, but seemed to think we were always to be wild, silly children to the end of our days.

“Soon after Master came to the Morfe,” so said old Bell, “he disappeared, the first time for two or three months, and then for a few weeks at a time, and at last he returned to give orders for the restoration and beautifying of the old house. And very well it looked, too, when all the timber was picked out in black, and the new purple and red tiles were put in, and the diamond windows. Then the garden was made beautiful! Such gravel walks, and beds of geraniums and roses, and the turf might have served for velvet, it was so smooth! But as to the gold and green room—that was made fit for a queen: with a long soft carpet that buried your shoes, and a harp, and beautiful books, and flower-stands! We knew what was coming then. And at last *she* did come, and a beautiful creature she was too! though the least bit wild and childish for a married lady; she had been accustomed to ride over country in her own parts, and after the hounds too, in a scarlet habit—at least, so I’ve heard say.

"However, she took to this gloomy place very sweet like, and to me. She used to come and sit by me and sing by the hour, and she'd ask for my old stories over and over again when she was dull and lonely. But she was like a child, and would run, and skip, and laugh as Miss Mildred may do now.

"But then she was so beautiful! I do see a look of her in Miss Mildred, now and again; but—oh dear—there——

"Well, as I was saying, she was so beautiful. She had shocks of auburn hair, as rich as sunshine on brown beeches, and a skin for all the world like the big white lilies under the dairy window, and a fresh, pink cheek withal, and so lithe of limb; but I could go on for ever, and you'd never picture my poor young mistress, and I know there was never another like her. Oh, how she sang! It was like a lark, or a linnet; and master used to sit and listen, and look as happy as she was; and then there came a little daughter, Miss Madeline, you know, and that seemed to make them happier. Then Miss Mildred was born, and about that time there came a change over my poor mistress, and the colour went, and the clear voice



changed, and she sprang and danced no more, but lay like a fading flower in her pretty sitting-room all the bright, sunny days, caring for nothing but her babies. And her large eyes looked bright; but the doctor said all would be well in time, but I knew better, and so it proved.

“She was dreadfully ill, and when Master James was born they said the child would die, but I knew better again, and said it was the mother. And sure enough the child struggled through, but my pretty mistress slept her last, and we laid her in her coffin, with the flowers she loved the best in her bosom, the dainty pink and white sweet peas, and the mignonette, and I’ve never been the same since, nor master neither.

“It went to my temper, and to his head. I’m sour, I know, at times; but I can’t help it—that is, I can’t help thinking how different it all would have been if she’d lived, sweet, loving soul; and master I thought would have lost his senses, and I think he has lost some of ’em, or he wouldn’t let those poor children run wild while he sits moping and musing and meditating there, in that dreary den of his,

while the house and all belonging to it is going to ruin. Where it's to end I don't know!

✓ "And if I'm not mistaken, something 'll come out one of these days, that 'll waken him up; for it's a sin not to look after them of your own house, as the Bible says, and there's a train of gunpowder tied to wrong-doings, that 'll blow up some day, though may be it 'll tarry, and surely it's wrong-doing to sit nursing your own selfish sorrow, and leave your work and your children to take their chance! Bailiffs don't dig gold out of ploughed fields hereabouts, and I should like to know where the money came from that set up yon ramshackling fandangled phæton, and that sticks feathers in folk's bonnets that has no business with 'em, and builds fine houses for them as should live like their neighbours."

These, and the like stories, used to be told to the housemaids and nursery-maids in succession; for under poor Bell's "physically sour" rule, housemaids, and cooks, and nursery-maids, changed with the seasons. *We* were still far too childish in Bell's opinion to be addressed in sober conversation. But we understood more than she thought, and drank in

eagerly all we could hear. And we had no love for Simon Buttermann, our father's bailiff, and were willing to share in Bell's suspicions. He was the only person who had gained my father's confidence, and he had done so by wiliness and determined wriggling, until at last everything was intrusted to him, and all authority placed in his hands. My father was too indolent to suspect him, and was only too glad to have some one willing and ready to act for him in any way, that he might give himself up to his misery and mourning. Yet every one whispered around him, as Buttermann's wealth increased in proportion as his master's decreased; and first a smart red brick house sprang up on the Brude road, and then a gay yellow phaeton appeared, while Mrs Buttermann's "feathers and ribbons, and gew-gaws," to use Bell's expression, set the whole congregation of the quiet little Brude church "a-gaping and a-gazing."

CHAPTER II.

OUR education could not be said to have been quite neglected, though it had been very different from that of most children in our position and at our age. The master of the grammar school at Brude was rather a clever man, though dull, dry, and old-fashioned, and he came to us three times a-week, to give us lessons in geography, history, grammar, and Latin. On Saturday he sent his usher, to give us three hours' arithmetic and writing, and twice a-week we had a French master, who imparted to us a certain knowledge of French, though, as we afterward found, it was a language almost unintelligible to the Parisian. But we did Hamel's exercises through and through, and could read it with pleasure to ourselves ; but, *voilà tout !* The lessons took up very little of our time. 7

rest was spent out of doors—shall I say it?—in climbing trees, swinging, rowing in our boat on the big pond, tending our many pets, and the like amusements.

I was very tall, though only fourteen. I was, I believe, five feet four, and very thin, with a long neck like a giraffe. I had great brown eyes, of which I always felt conscious, and in consequence afraid to look at any one. I remember Mr Mabberley said, when he saw me first, they were “*fauve*,” but my French dictionary did not give me the word, and it was long years after when I picked up the meaning. But I was even still more painfully conscious of having great hands, and long, ungainly arms, and whenever I spoke to any one in those days, my elbows tried to turn in, and my hands fidgeted in my dress to hide themselves; I must have been very awkward.

I always fancied, too, that my father did not like me. He was cold and reserved generally, and once I had heard him say to the old rector of Brude, “Mildred is so odd and reserved, I don’t know what to make of her.” And I fancy sometimes that these words

formed my character. It sounded like a destiny to me, and odd and reserved I was, and accepted it as my fate. But I think if I had been early taught to love, and had been called out of myself, I should have been neither.

But I had yet one more trial, and this was my sorest; must I tell it? Yes; for I have promised to myself that these records shall be faithful and true, even though I be humbled thereby. But—and reader, remember, I am no heroine, and my story is no novel—but, I had red hair—great shocks of fiery red hair! Not a little tinged, or a little golden, or auburn, or interesting, but nothing more nor less than carrotty! Yes; and in such masses it could not be hidden, and old Bell grumbled daily as she plaited and coiled and twisted it about my head, saying, “There was no knowing where to put it, and she should like to know how a bonnet was to fit on such a mountain of hair as that?” She had tried clipping it, but that had not answered; for then the stubborn fibre had stood on end, and I presented a strange appearance. As she said, the more she cut, the more *contrary* it grew. So latterly it had

been left alone, and when combed out it looked like a lion's mane.

I don't know whether I shall be despised for confessing that my vermilion locks cost me much real, though secret sorrow ; so much so, that I had a habit of turning my glass, that I might see myself as little as possible, and of turning away, if I passed at any time a mirror which would reflect them.

I had never told any one of my feelings on this subject, but I fancy James knew them ; but he had a gentle nature, and would never say a word that would wound another, above all me, for he loved me very fondly. He had far more tact than I, and knew instinctively what to say and leave unsaid, which I have never learnt to this day.

He was very handsome, well made, and tall. He had my father's chiselled mouth and chin, his clear skin and jet black hair, which curled almost girlishly. But he had a delicate, hectic colour, and was not strong ; indeed, I think I had more muscular strength than he. When we ran races, I always had to give him the start, and in rowing, which was our favourite amusement, he had always to give in first.

One day I overheard Jenetta Mabblerley telling her sisters that Lord Byron said a small foot and hand, curling hair, and a small ear, were signs of gentle blood. My eye fell on my own great shoe, and then on my unfortunate hands ; I remembered my obstinate straight hair, and without another thought I rushed at the little, gentle, lady-like Jenetta, shook her violently, and pushed her into a hedge. The next moment I was very sorry indeed, and helped her out of her prickly couch, wiped her arms, which were scratched and bleeding, and tried to soothe her as well as I could. But Mrs Mabblerley had seen the assault from the window and called us to her. Jenetta said nothing, only cried, but I told all that had happened. Mrs Mabblerley was very kind, though she told me if I did not strive to overcome that black demon, my evil temper, it would bring much misery on me and others. But I saw tears in her eyes as she spoke, perhaps she was thinking, too, like Bell, how different I should have been if I had had the care and guidance of a mother.

Then she smiled, and calling me to a glass, and pushing aside my red mane, she showed

me certainly a very white and shell-like little ear, at which I was obliged to laugh, through my thunder-cloud and tears.

Mrs Mabberley did not have me often at the rectory, and I noticed that when I was there I was seldom left alone with the girls. I am sure I do not wonder that she was afraid of me, when I remember what I was. Sometimes, though, she would come to see me, and once, when her daughters were away from home, she asked me and James to spend a week with her, which we enjoyed very much. I know she was trying to do me good.

But I must tell you how our gardening went on. For several mornings all prospered well. I think Nathan did not notice us at our work, and certainly, though we had laboured right diligently, we had cleared only about twenty yards of the broad carriage drive. One day, when we had grown more bold with success, Nathan came with his wheelbarrow suddenly upon us.

"Dear heart alive!" he said, "and what's all this about? Why, warn't the garden smart enow for ye. Well—I can tell ye, you must look for no help of mine in your whims and

fancies. I've got more nor enow on my shoulders already, without fiddling with ladies' flower-gardens. And what are ye going for to do next?"

But we maintained a prudent silence, till, when he had walked away a little distance, looking over his shoulder with a grim look of half amusement and half contempt at our work, James shouted out to him, "I say, Nathan, do lend us your barrow. You shall have it again in half an hour?"

"You may have it, if you won't go and play no tricks with it," and, leaving it on the path, he turned aside to examine a favourite bed of mangel-worzel, which had been planted where mangel-worzel never ought to have been, and which was a sad mar-plot to our grand gardening plans.

From this time we worked away at all hours, and our work progressed famously. Now and then Nathan's boy, Nat, would come and help us for an hour on the sly, and carry off our weeds in the wheelbarrow. At last the walks were visible, and the beds neatly raked, but still we were not satisfied with the effect. Mrs Mabberley kindly sent us some geraniums

and verbenas, but still something was wanting.

"I'll tell you what it is," said James, one day, as we stood contemplating our work, "the grass must be mown."

"So it must," I said; "but can it be managed?"

"Oh!" said James, "I'll tell you. I know where Nathan keeps his scythe. He keeps it in Dick's stable, and he locks the door, and puts the key in a hole at the top. I'll get it to-morrow morning and try what I can do."

And so he did, though I confess I was frightened at first, as I watched his awkward thrusts; but we persevered, and the grass was cut, though it was not very smooth and even. To clip the edges was my work, and then all was ready, only that the rugged grass needed rolling. We heard in the morning that my father was expected home at four, so we hurried into the garden to take turns at the garden roller. But it had to be displaced first, for it lay embedded in moss and gravel and weeds in a back-yard, where it had been unused ever since we could remember. We were obliged to get Nat to help us, and even then

it was very hard work to move it, and when by our united efforts it was dislodged, I saw James turn very pale, and put his hand to his side.

"Have you hurt yourself, sir?" said Nat, more anxious than I, for I was all eagerness for the completion of our task, and impatient at any interruption.

"No; nothing to signify," said James, and away he went with the roller, I following in triumph. It was a very heavy roller, as I found when I came to take my turn; but we were both determined and persevering, and worked away silently and diligently. I was bending over a bed of newly planted geraniums, when I noticed that the creak of the roller had ceased, and thinking that James wanted to be relieved, I looked up.

But I was indeed frightened then, for James was lying on the ground, and from his nose and mouth a stream of blood was running. I ran to him, raised his head on my knees, and gave a scream which would have roused the seven sleepers, and which brought Nathan, and Nat, and Bell, and everybody else, in a body.

"Whatever have ye been about?" said Nathan. "Goodness, heart alive! there never was anything like these children. Who'd ever ha' thought o' your getting at that big roller? Why, master had a donkey for 'em, because he said it was too heavy for one man!"

"Don't stand there talking," said Bell; "but lift the lad up, and bring him in at the back door, with those dirty boots of yours. And Nat, you fetch the doctor, I tell ye. Oh deary, deary me! I always thought it 'ud come to this. This comes of letting children grow up like wild colts, for I'm sure they're no better; keep out of the way, Miss Mildred, you've done mischief enough for one day, I should reckon."

And thus issuing her commands, Bell led the way, I following meekly and silently, but oh, so miserable at heart—how miserable it would be hard to say.

James was laid on his bed, and the bleeding had stopped, and he was partly restored to consciousness before the doctor came. But he had broken a small blood-vessel, and the orders were, that he was to be kept exceedingly still and quiet for a long time.

In the midst my father arrived. How all our plans were spoiled !

He was very angry with me as the eldest, and pushed past me, on his way to James's room. Then he threw himself on the bed, and wept like a child. Some one reminded him that agitation was bad for James, and then he left the room, and we heard the door of his dungeon slam. The next minute the hæmorrhage had returned.

My poor father, I have often thought he wished to do well by us, but that he did not know how ! I think there was a constant struggle going on in his mind. He feared to set his heart on us, lest he should again be left desolate by losing us. I was very like him, and we both met troubles in the same way. We stormed at them, and longed to embody and fight them, and were almost maddened by them for the time. And then this impatient frenzy was succeeded by a fit of gloom, and for the future we avoided and shrank from all that would remind us of the wound.

It was a selfish sorrow, but I can understand so well from my own feelings, how it was that my father had allowed my mother's death to

affect him as it did. I believe he often turned away from us, because we reminded him of her.

James had a long illness ; that is to say, he was weak, and had to be kept very quiet for several months, till the weeds had had time to grow again, and our flowers to die from want of water. The garden, too, henceforth was a sore subject. We were forbidden to work in it, and it soon became a ruder wilderness than before.

But James's illness was rather a happy time. I used to sit by his couch, drawing or reading all day, and we read through Spencer and the "Scottish Chiefs," and almost all the Waverley novels.

I discovered them on a top shelf in the library, and a great feast and find it was for us. My drawings at this time, I am sorry to say, were chiefly caricatures ; but I spared not myself, it is also fair to say. They were done in a fashion of my own, for I was untaught, and with a broad, soft quill pen, and with ink.

CHAPTER III.

THERE are few places like the Morfe now. It was a large, waste place, covered with fern and gorse, and affording shelter for many a camp of gipsies. It skirted the Severn on the south bank for several miles, hanging over the towing path in wild, rough crags, clothed with yellow broom and heather, and snap-dragon. Our house fronted the high road, which crossed the Morfe, but it was almost hidden by a row of old Scotch firs, weird and quaintly shaped from age, which grew within the high wall surrounding the premises. The rooks made their nests in these trees, and cawed out mysteriously from their black boughs. We used to think so at least.

The wall and the farm buildings shut us in on three sides, while the fourth was bounded by the high rocky cliffs which overhung the

river, and which to most people would have been impassable. But it was just here we had broken our bounds. When we went outside the walls, we were obliged to submit to the company of Bell, so we generally preferred remaining in our own ground, especially as we had an outlet, which I will describe. At the highest point of the cliffs, where also they were steeper and straighter than elsewhere, grew a fine old elder tree, in such a manner that its trunk formed a kind of seat, hanging, as it were, in the air. This for a long time had been a favourite perch of ours, and here we had sat many and many an hour, with our books; in the early spring time, when the white clusters of blossom shook out fresh fragrance about our heads, and in the autumn, when the boughs bent with rich bunches of purple berries. It was certainly a perilous place, and we called it the eagles' perch; but we had another ambition, and that was to reach the eagles' nest. This lay about fifty feet below, and was a tuft of trees, growing on a projecting rock. But between us and it the rock was steep and bare, saving for the cotyledons and wild gilliflowers which grew upon it.

Our first step was to lower a kind of swing made of a knotted rope. We let it down little by little, and as we sat in it we cut rough steps in the rock with a hoe. At last we reached our goal, and then we left our knotted rope for a hand-rail, and climbed up and down our steep staircase with ease. But it was a dangerous undertaking, and only wild goats like ourselves would have attempted it.

The eagles' nest itself we soon converted into a kind of bower, cutting a rough seat in the rock. From it to the towing-path beneath was a steep descent, but to us it was comparatively easy. So now we were let loose, and we often scrambled down, and watched the barges as they went backwards and forwards, floating leisurely and lazily down the river.

It became in time to us a very day-dream of delight, this life of the bargemen, and we used to think it would be perfect happiness to have a barge of our own to live in.

It was one day early in September, (I know because the beech masts were on the ground), when we scrambled down from the eagles' nest, and sat on the bank beneath, watching the river as it slid along, silently and swift.

"Here comes the red bargeman," said James; "what a handsome old fellow he is! I like that queer, furry cap he wears, and the red waistcoat; they are so picturesque."

"Yes, and the red handkerchief for a head-dress becomes his pretty daughter as well. What a strange name for a barge, too! I wonder what they know about Undine? How smoothly the water glides along. I could fancy it a water-spirit. Oh, James, how I should like to go on board the barge! Suppose we go to Brude, and walk back by the towing-path."

I stood up, and I suppose made some sign, for the barge drew close to us, and the man called to his horse to stop. He must have known us well, we had so often watched him pass from that seat, and he smiled and said,—

"Wouldn't the young lady and gentleman like to go down the river to-day? It is a pleasant morning, and wonderful pretty down beyond yonder reach?"

"We should like to come very much, only we have no money here. James, do run and fetch my blue bead purse. It will not take many minutes."

James went after a little hesitation. He soon returned, bringing the blue bead purse, which contained all our united riches—a half sovereign, two half-crowns, a crooked sixpence, and a silver penny. He had also brought a basket filled with cake and biscuits, which Bell had given him, as she often did, that we might have our luncheon out of doors, and a long morning for our own amusement.

The old man helped us on board the boat with great courtesy, and the young girl brought two broken chairs for us on the little deck. Oh, how delightful it was, going gently down the river, catching at the forget-me-nots and meadow sweet on the banks, fishing for water-lilies over the side, hooking down the stately bulrushes and the yellow flags! We steered, we sang, we chattered, we laughed, and forgot meanwhile that time was going fast, and that we were far from home.

James was the first to be alarmed. As we came near some hills, which looked blue and distant from the Morfe, and which now seemed close at hand, "Oh, Mildred," he said, "see how far we are from home; how shall we get back?"

"Oh, walk, of course," I said ; "I've often wanted to see how far I can walk. Besides, by the river side it will be lovely."

"But put us out now, bargeman," said James, "indeed, we must not go further, Mildred."

"Maybe the young lady would like to go through the lock?" said the bargeman's daughter, "it's only just and bye."

"Oh yes," I said, clapping my hands ; for I had once seen a lock, and thought the passage looked perilous, and therefore delightful. But the 'just and bye' was a long time coming, and then we had to wait at the lock for our turn to come, which caused a long delay. The excitement at the lock drove away all our anxiety about time, so that when we were through it we were wild to go a little further, for just in sight we espied an island on the river.

It was very pretty, certainly, with willows bending over into the water, and a picturesque white-washed cottage in the midst. "Perhaps the young lady and the young gentleman would like to get out here?" said the young girl. "Grandmother lives here ; and she has

a sight of pretty baskets, which she makes, poor soul, for her living."

Of course we should; anything adventurous and new was charming to us, so we splashed through the swampy ground, and followed the girl to the cottage we had seen. But now we began to feel frightened. It was getting dusk, and there were several rough-looking men drinking in the cottage, and the old basket weaver herself had a cunning, unpleasant countenance. So we tried to hurry away, and were running back to the boat, when we remembered we had not paid for our trip. The girl was following us, and waited while I fumbled for my purse. "It's gone, James," I said, as I turned out all the contents of my pocket; where can it be? Oh, James, what shall we do?"

James looked vexed, and pulling me away, said to the girl, "We must then pay you another time, unless you find our purse on the boat. Mildred, what *can* you have done with it?"

The girl was pushing aside the grass, and pretending to look for it among the sedges; but I was fairly crying, I felt so sure my purse

had been taken, and it contained all our little hoard!

"Come, come, we must go," said James. "Mildred, don't stand crying there; where is the boat?"

"Father's gone down the river, sir; he's off to Bristol, but there'll be a barge by soon, I reckon."

And there, sure enough, we were, prisoners till another barge should pass! And meanwhile we watched the sun go down, and the pale stars come out, and darkness come stealing over us. How we raged and fumed, but it did no good—and at last, just as we were in the depth of despair, a coal barge came in sight.

The girl had tried to persuade us to come to her grandmother's cottage till the morning, and now she urged it again. "Father's barge will be back by sunrise," she said; "won't you stop at the cottage? You're seven long miles from the Morfe, sir!"

"No, no, no," said James; "we must go, Mildred, we must go."

"The towing-path is flooded by Brude meadows," continued the girl, "how will the young lady get by there?"

But James had hailed the barge, and was persuading the man who belonged to it to put us on the towing-path, which, after a little grumbling, he consented to do. And now we set off, half running, half walking ; at first, starting and holding each other's hands at any slight noise or passing shadow, but by degrees growing bolder and more confident.

"Oh, Mildred," said James, as soon as he had breath to speak, "I care for nothing, now we are safely away from those people. We were very wrong to come."

"I suppose so ; and oh, James, all our money !"

"It serves us right," said James, "and how angry Bell will be !"

Whereupon we started off to run again, cautiously though, for it was very dark, and the towing-path was narrow. It must be remembered, too, that we were very hungry, for we had had no dinner, and the remains of our lunch had gone off with the barge to Bristol.

We found it as the girl had told us ; when we got about three miles from home, the towing-path was flooded.

We stood for a moment in dismay, and then James said—

“Mildred, what are we to do?”

“Go splash through it,” I replied.

“No,” he said; “the ground will be so slippery underneath, we shall both get into the river and be drowned. For see how bare the rock is; there is not a bramble to catch by!”

“Then we must go over the Morfe.”

“I suppose so,” said James; “but how are we to find the way, it is so dark? And, you know, there are so many pits half hidden by the furze. But I suppose we must try. It will frighten them at home so much, or we might sleep under this hedge.”

But I felt how wet the grass was, and I remembered James’s cough and delicacy, so I said, “Nonsense, James, we’ve come more than half way; besides, I feel at home when we’re once on the Morfe.”

We passed one or two cottages which lay on the way, but they were shut up and dark; all the inhabitants were gone to bed.

So we went on silently for a time. The wind whistled keenly over the moor, and rustled the dry ferns and the gorse. Dark

clouds moved quickly across the sky, hiding the moon, which had now risen, and might otherwise have cheered us. Suddenly we came upon a camp of gipsies, indeed we were almost upon them before we were aware of them ; for we had climbed a knoll, and they lay sheltered under the hill. The fires looked comfortable ; but several dogs snarled at us, and we ran our swiftest lest they should wake some unpleasant-looking men, who lay sleeping on the ground. We had several lesser alarms. A toad crossed our path. A shadow moved along the road, we thought ; and we stood still for a moment to summon courage to pass the place, where it had disappeared. At last we made a rush, and increased our speed as we heard a clank and a rustle close at our side. It was only a blind horse, belonging to an old labourer of my father's, as we saw soon after, and the noise was caused by the chain and log he dragged behind him.

Again, a little further, we walked straight into a black, muddy pond, and started back to continue our walk, dripping, and with heavy shoes.

At last we saw lights, and knew they were

at our home ; and now we set forward with lighter hearts. We cared not, though two owls passed over our heads, hooting mournfully, and though bats flapped in our faces. We scarcely noticed the glow-worms in our paths, or the smell of the wild thyme, as we crushed it under our feet.

At last we reached home, and never shall I forget the scene that met our eyes then. There was poor old Bell, pacing up and down the great hall, wringing her hands, and denouncing everybody and everything. There was Nathan, ringing away at an alarm bell, with all his might. There was Nat, disentangling the great drag net, and two of my father's labourers were just setting out with lanterns in their hands, for a search. The other maid-servants were busied filling every available candlestick (by Bell's order) for a general illumination.

"Maybe they're wandering on the Morfe, and the lights will guide them," we heard her say, "my poor, dear lambs. To think I should live to see the day ! There's no knowing what they'll be up to next. Oh, deary, deary me. Why, if they are not come after all, and as reek as mice, and me all in a tremble, and

the house turned topsy-turvy! Ain't you ashamed of yourselves, to raise all this commotion? Here, let us see; why, as wet as drowned rats! There—go to bed, and don't stand staring there!”

And then Kitty, Jane, and Mary were dispatched for warming-pans, hot flannels, possets, and nostrums; and, with alternate coaxings and scoldings, we were tucked into warm blankets, and slept as soundly as though nothing had happened.

But this adventure did not improve our reputation in the neighbourhood. It got wind, and we were talked of as marvels of wilfulness and rebellion. One other trick that winter added to our notoriety. James had a big kite, and one night I snatched up Nathan's stable lantern, and suggested tying it to the tail of the “Fire-fly.” There was a brisk breeze stirring, and we sent the kite out of the granary window. It flew capitally, and the light with it, and then I ran and roused the household. Every one turned out to see the wonder, and Nathan and Bell stood shading their eyes with their hands, to see the better. “It was a comet, they were sure, and if so it would set

the world on fire, for it was coming down, sure enough."

And so it was, and at last it lodged at the end of the garden. James ran to it, flung his kite into the shade, and called Nathan to see it was his stable lantern. I thought the old man's hair stood on end, and to this day he tells some mysterious story about the flying lantern.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was about a year after my first record, when one day Bell caught me, as I passed her room door, saying, "Now, Missie, here's your work. You haven't done a stitch this month. Come and sit down, and do six button holes. I've just got this frock body ready to try on, too. So shut the door, and for goodness sake don't make such a wind."

The truth was, I was making custards, and did doubtless raise a dust and a wind.

Now, of all things in the world I hated needlework; but I had to give in, and soon I was safely imprisoned, and then my torments began. First I had "to be tried," as Bell called it, though there was never much attempt at fitting in my dresses. Then she unfolded a parcel she had lately brought from Brude, and which I knew contained my winter wardrobe,

but which aroused little curiosity in me, as Bell's choice was of uniform ugliness. First she took out a green silk, which she told Kitty, the housemaid, who stood by, she considered "lovely." Then a snuff-coloured merino, and then a large piece of scarlet and green woollen plaid to make a cloak. Lastly, she opened, with a very grand air, a small box, which contained a drab beaver gipsy bonnet, with a great feather sticking straight up upon it, and a quantity of green ribbon trimming.

Kitty admired and exclaimed at each disclosure, but I was silent, whereupon Mrs Bell said it was disheartening to buy things for Miss Mildred. She cared no more what she wore than a post. "Indeed, she believed, upon her honour, she'd like to wear a sack, so that it was comfortable." And then, inspecting my button holes, and pronouncing them "down-right shameful," she sent me to a window-seat to improve my temper and my stitches, in solitude. I had been trying for the last six weeks to make a button hole, at least Bell had been trying to teach me. I am afraid I *rather* gloried in the irregularity of the outline of my attempts, and enjoyed irritating poor Bell by

calling them islands—the Shetlands and the Hebrides, with rugged shores.

As I sat at my work, I could hear Bell talking to Kitty. For some time their conversation interested me very little, till at last I caught some words which attracted my attention.

“Well, it’s no business of mine, you may say; but I never knew no good come of it, *never*. There was my brother’s wife’s cousin’s husband. She died, poor soul, and left six of ’em, and *he* took another, and a pretty life they had of it. One of them was burnt to a cinder before the year was out, and all of them had the small pox, and two died at sea. Well, you’ll say, that wasn’t her fault; but there was a deal that was, and I never knew any good come of it.”

I was busy rescuing a fly from a spider with my needle, but I stopped as she went on to say, “and I do say, if he does it, the least he can do is to give them one fitting their station in life, and not bring half-a-dozen children, to fight like cats and dogs with the rightful owners, poor dears! Miss Mildred won’t stand it. You mark my words!”

I had caught the drift of the story, and already stood up flushed and frightened, like a startled deer.

"What's that, Bell?" I said, "don't you know I'm here?"

"Oh, yes; to be sure—and I was only saying you'd never stand being trampled on by a stepmother, if you'd got any of your mother's spirit in you, or bear to be pushed about by half-a-dozen step-brothers and sisters. You, at your age, too, when you're scarce a child, one might say."

"What do you mean, Bell?" I said, the colour rising to my temples, and my heart beating fast with excitement.

"Why, I mean this," said Bell, in a raised voice, "though I didn't mean to have told you; but it do seem a shame that all the country side should be talking of it, and you, his own flesh and blood, know nought of it. It should have come from himself, I've sense to know; but since he don't care for his own, it's no fault of mine, and if I didn't tell ye, some one else would. So now you shall have it. There'll soon be a new mistress of Morfe, and a new mamma for you and the young

master. I've heard it's a Mrs Mackenzie, of Rotherham, and a widow she is, with some half score children ; so now you know."

Yes, indeed, I knew—and even Bell looked half frightened at the effect of the words ; for I flung my work away, into some damson cheese which stood to cool on a side table, stamped my foot in a rage, and burst into a passionate fit of crying.

Bell said, "There, don't take on——" but I sprang at her like a tiger, and shook her dress with my teeth, till the poor old woman cried out for mercy. Kitty and she together loosened my hold, and then I ran out of the room, and into the garden, in search of James.

I found him fishing, and lying upon the grass very peacefully. I poured forth my story, eagerly and angrily, and then began again to cry. James took it very quietly, and when he had heard all I had to say, he said—"Well, Mildred, and why are you so angry ? I think I am very glad."

"Glad, James ! then you don't love our mother's memory, and you won't care to see another where she would have been ?" and I

tore up the grass and threw it by handfuls into the pond.

"Our mother would be glad that we should have some one to teach us, and make us more what we ought to be, Mildred."

"And then she is poor, and has lots of children, and we shall be trampled upon, and turned out of our rightful position, and——"

"For shame, Mildred ; Bell had no right to say all that, and you ought not to listen to her. It's very wrong."

"Well, *I* shall call her stepmother, and you know in books they are always bad. You may do as you please, but I shall be miserable."

James laughed. "Very well, Mildred, and I won't ; but come, wouldn't it be nice to have somebody to make all this place pretty and comfortable ; and to care about us, and make us feel that we are loved, and to teach us how to be like other people ?"

"She will never do that. Oh, James, I can't think how you can talk so !"

But James only whistled, and followed his line, for he had a bite, and then he left me to have my cry out by myself.

Afterwards I let James talk me over, till by

degrees I thought it would be nice to have some one to care for us, and we planned that *she* would teach us drawing, and buy my clothes, and play the harp, that had so long stood silent in my mother's room.

Very soon after, orders were given for the house to be put in order. Our mother's room was to be done up, and the great carriage was sent to Clifftington to be re-painted and re-stuffed. Carpenters and painters were set to work upon the house, and we enjoyed the stir and excitement not a little. Bell said, though, that "it was not as it was the first time." And certainly as little was done as possible to make the house habitable and respectable, and the garden remained untouched.

One day we overheard Nathan and Bell talking over a matter which we little heeded then, but which came to our minds in after years.

"I can't think what the master's about," said Nathan, flinging down a truss of hay under Mrs Bell's window. "He must be as blind as a mole, I say. And if that Simon ain't the greatest rogue living, I am mistaken.

"That's no news," said Bell, crustily.

"He won't listen to me," Nathan went on, "else I could tell him this here farm is a dead loss to us, when it might be doing right well. And as to the rents, they don't find their way to master's pocket, if I'm an honest man!"

"You seem pretty sure of that," said Bell, who was in a bad temper.

"I only hope the new missis'll have her eyes about her, that's all, or we shall go to the dogs before long. I can see that, though my eyesight ain't very good."

And away Nathan went, shouldering his truss. My father was very much away then. He spent a great deal of time, we knew, with an old college friend near London, and we also found he was often at Rotherham. This we knew by his letters being forwarded there. When he was at home we went on much as usual, excepting that we used to go and sit by him, while he had his late dinner, and occasionally he would take us for a long walk by the river side, or over the Morfe. At these times James was much more at ease with him than I, though it was only the barrier of reserve which kept us aloof, and I believe my father would have been glad to have had it broken

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through. But I was reserved too, and so we were never at ease together.

We could see the spire of Rotherham church from some of the high points of the Morfe, and we had heard it was a pretty village some thirty miles from us.

When my mother's sitting room was opened, we stole in at first, with a kind of awe. There lay about many things which had been undisturbed since she had placed them there. A pair of tiny gloves I picked up, and in vain measured them with my own large hands. Several notes addressed to her, of which the ink was now pale and the paper yellow. Some boughs of holly, brown and withered, remained still over the pictures ; but what I cared for most was a portfolio of my mother's drawings, and which were very like my own, vigorous and original, but wanting in care and correctness.

Two years earlier, I had found some of her writing, and from that moment I had given all diligence to imitate it. In vain did my writing-master set before me the most perfect copper-plates. I had another model in my mind's eye, and I turned a deaf ear to his mild re-

monstrances, as to my short l's and long t's, and the "masculine character of my handwriting." I must have been a very trying pupil!

Certainly my poor mother's writing was not feminine, and mine was even less so, and, as I despised straight lines, I often wrote at that time from corner to corner of my sheets. This was my autograph in those days:—

Mildred Swynne

I collected all the precious memorials of my mother, and carried them upstairs into our own especial room (a now disused granary), for Bell said they must be put now out of sight, and she handed them over to me as rubbish. While turning them over, I came upon a parcel, carefully sealed up with black, upon which was written in my father's hand, "Madeline's hair."

I opened it eagerly. There lay a silken, glossy lock of chestnut hair! One of my own ever straying braids fell upon it. It was the

same! I could not be mistaken. I ran down to Bell in my joy. "See, Bell," I said, "my hair is like poor mamma's!"

Bell looked at me, and it, more gently than usual, and said, as she turned away, "Yes, it's wondrous changed lately. They say hers did, all of a sudden, like!"

Away I rushed to my own neglected glass, turned it from its position of disgrace, and gazed to my heart's content at my now auburn tresses. I felt as if a load was taken from my heart.

One day, when my father came home, he sent for us as usual to sit by him at dinner. We sat with our books till it was over, and then he called us to him, and, taking our hands in his own, he said, "Children, do you know that next week I am going to bring you a lady here, whom I hope will be a new mother to you?"

I was silent. James said, "I am very glad, papa."

"Has Mildred nothing to say?" said my father.

"James is very glad," I said, in my perverseness.

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My father looked annoyed, and I began to cry.

"Do you think it an occasion for crying?" said my father, loosing my hand, upon which my tears flowed faster.

"James," he said, turning from me, "you will try to be good and dutiful to her. I have not been able to do all for you I should have liked to do; but this lady will do what I cannot, and love you and make you happy if you are good children. I hope you will try to make her task a pleasant one?"

"We will try, indeed," said James; "and Mildred is glad she is coming; she has often said so, and she will try too."

"Then you have heard of it before?"

"Yes; Bell told us."

My father frowned. "What has she told you?"

James was silent.

My father turned to me. "What has she told you, Mildred?"

"That she is poor, and a widow, and has six children," I replied.

My father rose, and walked up and down the room. I had never seen him look so angry.

He bid us go to bed, and for the next few days he spoke very little to us, and then with displeasure. Bell, too, evidently had had a scolding; for she was much humbled in manner afterwards, and she took an early opportunity of telling us she was mistaken about the six children. There had been five or six, but there were only two living, a young lady about my age, and a young gentleman two years older. But he was gone to sea, and the young lady spent a great part of her time with her grand-mamma, Mrs Campbell, of Rotherham.

A few days after my father had spoken to us, the Mabbereys and their governess came early one morning to ask us to go and spend the day with them. We were very much pleased, and I ran to Bell for permission, which being granted, I had to submit to being decked out in my grass-green silk.

It was against my will, and I felt very uncomfortable in it, especially as the Mabbereys looked so much happier and better in their every-day lilac-print dresses.

I have since thought that my father asked Mrs Mabberey to talk to us about our new mother, for she knew her intimately; and

he was so reserved that he shrank from the task.

We had a happy morning in the garden, for we enjoyed the companionship of young people of our own age—the more, perhaps, from having had so little of it. The Mabberley girls had a kind, gentle governess, who made us all very happy, and they were so good, orderly, and affectionate to each other, that a day with them always seemed to me a glimpse into a better world. After our schoolroom dinner, we set out for a long walk, and Mrs Mabberley joined us. We were both very fond of her, and when she called us to her, to walk with her, we felt greatly honoured, even though I was in the midst of telling a long, mysterious story to the others—a story about brigands, and knights, and ladies, such as I loved to invent in those days.

“Your father has told you about the happy change that is about to take place in your home,” she said, after a time. “You must be very glad, are you not?”

“Yes,” said James. “Do you know her?”

“Very, very well. She is one of my dearest friends, and I know no one scarcely whom I

love and admire more. She is so good," she added, "that when I am with her I feel every moment valuable, as one would in the presence of an angel."

"I have never known any good people," I said, "I don't know whether I should like them."

Mrs Mabberley smiled. "You are flattering, Mildred," she said. "Strange to say, she was a friend of your own mother, and one of her bridesmaids. She herself married, shortly after your mother, a clergyman, who was a college friend of your father's. They lived near Rotherham, at a very pretty place; but about five years ago they lost three children in a very sad way, and Mr Mackenzie died soon after, leaving his young widow with two children."

"Young?" I said, for I had pictured to myself a grim, gray, starched old matron, with a rod in her hand.

"Yes, young," said Mrs Mabberley, smiling again. "She married very young, and is scarcely five and thirty now. Very old, perhaps, though, that seems to you, Miss, in your teens."

“What is the name of her daughter,” I said, “and do you know her?”

“I do, indeed. Rose Mackenzie is one of the loveliest girls I know; lovely in every sense of the word—lovely in appearance, and most loveable from her goodness and gentleness.”

Mrs Mabberley little knew what she was doing. She little knew that my jealous, evil temper made me almost hate the original of this picture of loveliness, as one who would make me feel my own ugliness, and unamiability, and failings.

“And the son?” said James.

“I have never seen Ewen Mackenzie,” said Mrs Mabberley, “but from what I have heard of him, I should think he is a noble boy.”

“And they are poor?” I said.

Mrs Mabberley looked at me with some surprise. “I don’t know quite what to say to that. They are not rich, but I only call those people poor who cannot keep within their income. Mrs Mackenzie and Rose have very simple and inexpensive habits, and I scarcely think they would call themselves poor.”

I did not understand this then.

"Can she play and sing?" I asked.

"Yes, she is very accomplished. She draws beautifully, and has been abroad a great deal. She has educated Rose entirely herself, and she is all one would wish to see a girl of her age."

"And when is she to come?" said James; "I hope it will be very soon."

"Next week," said Mrs Mabberley. "I tried to persuade your father to let you be at the wedding, and I believe she has tried also, but he is angry with you for the way you received the announcement. Besides, her mother is ill, and the wedding will be very quiet."

We were both silent.

"And, dear children," she continued, "I do hope you will do your part to make her coming to you happy. Do not receive her with sullen looks and reserve. Remember she has had many sorrows; do not add another! Be open, and frank, and receive her with affection, and then you will find she will be an untold blessing to you."

There were tears in James's eyes, but I felt proud and naughty, and I thought to myself,

"I will not be told who I am to like—this model stepmother and this perfect Rose!" But I said—

"James was good; why didn't he go to the wedding? He is not sullen and reserved, and he is glad she is coming."

"And are not you, Mildred?" said Mrs Mabberley with a sigh. Doubtless she was thinking of her friend's hopeless task in undertaking my improvement.

"No," I said; "I know she won't like me. Nobody does. Besides, she ought not to have mamma's room and her harp, and I suppose we shall have to sit good, and praise and admire this lovely Rose all day."

This was said in so naughty a tone that Mrs Mabberley made no reply for a few minutes. The silence was rather terrible to me, for I felt sorry, directly the words had passed my lips, and would fain have recalled them. We were come near the house, and as we separated to go into the school-room, Mrs Mabberley said, very gently, but sorrowfully, "Mildred, I'm sorry for you. You're laying up a store of misery for yourself. I can only advise you to pray that your proud temper

may be subdued and humbled, for no one can do it for you."

The pleasure of the day was over for me. I sat moody and silent, really only angry with myself; but too proud to confess this to my kind friend, and thus to take the burden from my conscience.

I made a very great effort as I went away, but I only blundered out in a rough manner, "I didn't mean quite all I said;" but Mrs Mabblerley met me more than half way, kissed me affectionately, and said,—

"My poor child, do not forget my advice. It is the best I can give you."

I have often thought what happy girls the Mabblerleys were, to have such a mother as they had. She had a sweet face, a mother's face—gentle and loving, yet at the same time there was something in her manner which carried authority. I used to admire the pretty lace caps, with something of pink about them, which half covered her braids of soft and glossy hair, and the full, flowing dresses, always of some sombre shade, which became so well her tall and graceful figure. She was my ideal mother. My own mother I thought of more

as the beautiful heroine of a sad and sacred story.

But from the day when this conversation with Mrs Mabberley took place, I added to my formal morning and evening prayers these words, "Humble the pride in my heart, O Lord, and teach me how to be good."

I little knew then how bitter was the process of humbling so proud a heart as mine ; indeed, I scarcely knew the meaning of the words I used. I think I looked upon my prayers as a meaningless talisman. I had fancied I had traced unhappy days back to the neglect of them ; but beyond this I had no light.

CHAPTER V.

IT may be wondered that our sister Madeline should have been so little thought of in our daily life. She was extremely pretty, and consequently she had taken the fancy of our only aunt, Mrs Stillingfleet, the wife of a rich county member. She had no children, and had therefore begged of my father to intrust the little Madeline to her, at my mother's death. My father was only too glad to have one of us well cared for, and my aunt carried her away in her mourning dress, a few days after the funeral. I believe at first she proposed to take me also, but my father would not give me up while I was so young, and afterwards, when he was more willing, my aunt shrank from the herculean task of remodelling me, with my ruby locks, large hands, and awkward gait.

But Madeline had become quite her own. She had taken her to London for lessons ; had had foreign governesses for her, and this winter she was to be introduced. She was seventeen, and very beautiful. She had the same auburn hair, ivory skin, and clear colour as my mother ; but she was small and delicately made, and had a self-possessed, formed manner. She had come to pay us stated visits when we were little children ; but she never seemed quite happy with us, and by degrees her visits became less frequent, and her letters more condescending and scarce.

The last news our father had told us was that she was engaged to be married to a Sir Wallace Willoughby, a Scotch baronet, and the news affected us little more than to call for the remark, " Then she will be Lady Willoughby !"

About ten days after our visit to the Maberleys, Bell told us one day that the master and mistress would be at home that afternoon, and she hoped we should be " up to no tricks."

The great library had been swept, white-washed, and dusted, the books replaced, many of them upside down, and there was an attempt

at a star-like arrangement of a few of the most showy round the drawing-room table, but even I felt there was the want of a lady's hand in the ordering of things.

I felt very awkward and helpless, but I did what I could ; I collected all the vases, and filled them with what flowers I could find, sprays of the traveller's joy, silvery and feathery in that autumn time, and bright bunches of mountain ash berries, intermixed. Blue harebells, fern leaves, and heather from the Morfe—I even plucked my only tea-rose, a great treasure, and put it in a glass in my mother's room. I had just done this, when Bell called me to be dressed. In going to her, it was necessary I should pass the open door of my father's dungeon ; I peeped in, what possessed me I know not ; but yet I do know, for an evil spirit had mighty influence over me in those days.

My mother's picture hung over the chimney-piece. I went to it on tip-toe, took it down, and hung it up again, turning it with its face to the wall. Then, going out, and closing the door after me, I went to Bell, and was dressed *in a clean, white muslin frock, with a white*

sash—a fitting dress, she thought, for the occasion.

Bell was in a better temper than usual, and had put on red ribbons and a silk gown. But my father and my stepmother were late in coming, and we got quite tired of sitting in state, so James walked out upon the hill to see if he could see them, and I, thinking to achieve the same end more quickly, and to be the first to give the warning, climbed cautiously upon the wall overlooking the road, which was on the garden side rather low, but to the road was high, and flanked by a broad, ugly, green ditch. They were not to be seen, but I, liking my position, soon set my heart on making the round of the premises, which I did very successfully, and was on my way back again, intent on my perilous footing, when the newly-painted carriage came close upon me before I was aware of it. Yes, and I had been seen. I saw my stepmother's good-natured smile, and I saw also my father's frown. I, a great girl of nearly fifteen, in my smart white muslin dress, and white ribbons, to be seen walking on a wall! I was even disgusted with myself. I jumped down hastily, and in so doing greened

and tore my dress, ran stumbling again upon it up the stairs, and had just reached the granary, and had time to bolt myself in, (as I thought,) when I heard the carriage stop, and James's voice, merry and pleasant, giving the welcome.

I bit my lip with vexation, and felt utterly miserable; suddenly I remembered my mother's picture. Was it too late! Could I even now steal down and undo my evil deed? But no; I heard steps on the stairs, and a sweet voice saying, "Where can she be? We must find Mildred. How naughty of her to run away! Oh, I can climb anywhere. Up here, do you say?"

And then I heard James's voice saying, "I fancy she tore her frock, and ran away to mend it."

And then to my amazement, for in my haste I had missed the bolt, in walked my stepmother. It was a strange reception-room for a bride, our dusty, untidy granary!

I felt very angry with James, and painfully conscious of the treasures which lay strewn before me on the table, the drawings, letters, the packet of hair; but my awkward

ness soon lessened in the presence of my stepmother.

She was so fresh, so warm, so gentle, and so quick to understand, almost before the words were spoken. She kissed me, laughed at my being caught on the wall, and at my torn gown, and told me to come down-stairs and she would mend it. She did not wonder, she said, that we loved the old granary, it was a charming place, so full of nooks and recesses ; and then she took me with her into her room, and let me sit with her, while she changed her dress and prepared for dinner. Then we went down together into the drawing-room, and I sat on a settee, while my stepmother, on a low chair at my side, darned my torn dress.

Oh if that picture could but have been turned I should have been really happy ! But that was impossible, for I had heard my father go into his dungeon, and slam the door.

"You must take me to the eagle's nest, and to your perilous swing," for she added, "*J'aime l'escarpolette à la folie.*"

This allusion to my favourite "*Tales of the Castle*" delighted me immensely.

"You know," she continued, "I have heard

of your scapegrace doings, and I confess I quite longed to have been one of your river-barge party. It must have been very delightful."

James was quite in ecstasies. "Oh, we shan't do such mad things now you are come," he said, "because you can understand fun. Bell thinks there are only two ways—the stiff good boy and girl way, and the altogether bad and good-for-nothing way."

My stepmother, I thought, looked rather grave.

"That is," said James explanatorily, "we don't mean any harm often when we do these things; only we like fun and liberty, and then I think we are spurred on by knowing what a rage poor Bell will be in."

"I don't think we know anything about right and wrong," I said. "I don't know what good boys and girls do." It was my first remark, and my stepmother looked at me rather sorrowfully, but with interest. The darn was just done, and I stooped to kiss her, and for the moment felt really happy. Just then Bell came to say my father wanted *me*, and the misery returned. I followed

Bell trembling. I saw from the look in her face she knew all, and I felt ashamed. When we came to the door, she almost pushed me into the room, saying, "There, you'll reap the fruits of the bad grain you've sown now, I reckon."

I stood near the door, stiff with fear, cold, and shaking from head to foot. My father stood before the fire. His back was to me, and he did not speak for some time. At last he said, coldly and quietly, (I wished he had been angry)—

"Mildred, one more offence of this kind, and I send you out of my house. Go to your room, and you will not leave it till you have permission. But stay," he added, as I turned to go, "come here, replace that picture yourself."

I did so, and then I saw a tear glistening in my father's eye, and I threw myself at his knees, and sobbed out, "Oh, do not tell her. Do what you please to me, but do not tell her what I have done."

My father's face softened. He even stooped and kissed me, but then turning from me, he motioned with his hand for me to leave the room, and I obeyed.

I went up-stairs. It was still light, scarcely six in an early October day. The table was laid in the dining-room, where a cheerful fire was burning. I could hear my stepmother and James talking together very merrily; but I had to turn away from everything that was pleasant, on this day to which I had been looking forward in my secret heart, and I went sorrowfully into my room, and shut the door. It was a comfortless room, large and bare, with little carpet, and a curtainless bed. There were no little elegancies or comforts about it. Bare cleanliness, and angular, formal tidiness was Bell's ideal of things. I sat by my window, and tried to read, but my thoughts were too wilful and busy. I thought it would be of no use for me now to try to begin anew. I should be shut up here in disgrace, and my stepmother would doubtless hear from the servants, if not from my father, the nature of my offence.

I was humiliated as I had never been before. Could it be an answer to that prayer I had been praying? If so, I would pray it no more.

I heard all that was going on. The dinner-

bell, the hum of voices during the meal-time, a lull, and soon after I saw my father, and my stepmother, and James, walking round the garden. James's head hung down, as I had often seen it, when he was unhappy, and I saw him look up several times sorrowfully at my window. I hid myself, so that I could not be seen, but I could see them plainly as they walked backwards and forwards in the moonlight. Then they went in, and soon after I heard a guitar, and singing, and then Bell came and brought me my tea and a candle, pushing it towards me without a word or a look. When she went away, I heard her lock the door, and take the key away, and soon after I heard the whole family go to their several rooms. I threw myself upon my bed, and was just half-dozing, when I heard the door open, and from the voices I knew it was Bell and my stepmother who entered. "Poor child," said my stepmother, "she looks very wretched, and see she has not touched her food. We must take care of her, whatever her offence may have been." Then she did not know — My heart leapt with joy. And then my stepmother closed the window

I had left open, and brought a soft warm wrapper and threw over me, and took away the cold, uninviting tea Bell had left me, and put in its place a few sandwiches and a glass of wine. I did not stir, though once I was very nearly springing up and opening my heart to my kind stepmother, but my pride kept me back. But when she was gone I took the wine, for I was feeling faint and exhausted, and then I went to bed and to sleep; but I had ugly dreams and nightmares, and I awoke in the morning with a sense of overhanging misery.

Bell brought me a comfortable breakfast, but I would not touch it. A new idea had possessed me. If I were to refuse food, and get ill, then perhaps people would care about me. So I flung a handkerchief over the temptation, and walked up and down the room. The morning passed away, and no one came near me. I saw James go with my father to the stables, and I saw my stepmother and Nathan go the round of the garden, as if she were suggesting improvements; but I kept my curtain drawn, and no one saw me. At last I grew so wretched from exhaustion and

a feeling of loneliness, that I sat down and sobbed aloud. I forgot that the window was open, and that my stepmother had just gone in at the library window, which was under me. Soon I heard her talking long and earnestly to my father, and I caught these words of his, "Well, I leave her to you ; but I think it is better to make her understand at first, and once for all, that I will have no insubordination, but that she must and shall submit herself to you. She has got the will of a mule, and a proud, ungovernable temper, which no gentle measures will subdue."

I could not hear my stepmother's reply, but very soon after I heard a step coming towards my door, and before I had time to remove the traces of my tears, she stood at my side. She certainly was very lovely. I had scarcely realized it yesterday, in my vexation and confusion. It was scarcely beauty of feature, but grace of form, and the charm of varying expression. She came up to me, and, laying her hand on my shoulder, said—"We want you to join us again, dear child, will you come?"

"No, thank you," I said, "I have not been here long enough yet."

Mrs Gwynne smiled. "What do you mean?" she said.

"I have done something wrong, and I don't feel good yet ; that is, I mean the cloud isn't gone, and if I come down I shall do something wrong again."

"But do you know you are doing something very wrong now, by not eating your breakfast? You are making yourself ill, and only nursing your sorrow. Put it away for this time. I know you are sorry, and all shall be forgiven and forgotten. Come down with me and have some luncheon, and then, would you like to come with me to Brude, across the Morfe? James is going with his father to Cliffington on some business."

It was something new for James to go anywhere with my father, and there was that in my stepmother's manner which overcame my obstinacy, and I quietly followed her down-stairs, and afterwards prepared for my walk. She was ready first, and came into my room as I took out the beaver bonnet and the plaid cloak, and then tied the strings much as one would tie a rope. I always turned away from the glass when I put on that ugly

bonnet, as I hated to see myself in it, and truly it must have been very hideous as I now remember it, with its row of green bows, contrasting with my ruby locks !

“ I thought we might make a few purchases at Brude, Mildred, and I think among other things we might get you a new bonnet.”

I must have looked very much pleased, for my stepmother laughed, and added, “ Yes, we will make several improvements in your wardrobe. Rebecca, the little maid I have brought with me, is a very clever dressmaker, and we will try and find other employment for Mrs Bell.”

It was a pleasant walk across the Morfe, that bright October day ! There was a fresh wind blowing, which swept with a rustle over the heather, and nodded the few remaining harebells. I always loved the wind, and each gust seemed to put new life in me, and to drive away the miserable feeling that had hung about me.

“ Mildred, dear,” said Mrs Gwynne, when we had walked some way, “ I am afraid you have been very wretched ; I want you to tell me all about it. I think it will help you, to

tell me about yourself, even if I cannot do much for you."

"Yes, it comes over me, and I can't help it

"What comes over you?"

"A kind of impulse to do wrong thing and then a sullen, proud feeling afterward which lasts a long time. I don't at all understand how people are good. I think there must be quite different altogether in every way to me."

"And you call that feeling after you have done wrong, 'the cloud?'"

"Yes, it makes me very miserable, and feel as if I should like to die."

"Poor child! It must be dreadful. But, do you know, Mildred, I think you owe this much to never having learnt the child's first lesson—obedience. Your will has never been broken in, and now it has become a tyrant even to yourself. But it is not too late; the very strength of your will will help you if you are really anxious to do right. You are no longer a child, and have not to obey uninquiringly those set over you, in the same way as in childhood—at least no one would require it of you; but, Mildred, you must submit your will

to God's will, my child, if you would learn what He would have you to do."

"It's no use trying to make me good," I replied; "it's too late. In little things I never shall be. And, after all, I am not quite sure that I care to be. I should like to do something great, build a church, or be a nun, or a missionary."


"If you cannot deny yourself in little things, you are not likely to do so in great things. Besides, we are to be good in the way God pleases, not in the way we please. He has placed you in your home, and requires of you to be obedient, and dutiful, and patient there. That is your training for any other work He may give you to do when you are fit for it. But you will be fit for nothing good or great if you cannot learn these lessons."

"To be patient, and obedient, and dutiful. That sounds to me uninteresting and dull, and like the good girl out of a story book."

"It seems to me, Mildred, that you don't care to know what you ought to do, that you may do it. You only care to be something that you admire yourself, to satisfy your own vanity."

I thought for a moment, and then I felt that my stepmother was right. I did only care to please, not to give pleasure. I only cared to realise a certain ideal of my own, I did not care to know whether that ideal was a right one. I liked goodness in as far as it seemed beautiful to me, just because I liked anything beautiful, but that was all.

I am drawing a very unlovable picture, I know, but when I began to write my own history, I made a solemn resolution that I would tell the bare truth, striving not to conceal any of the evil that was in me. I had a jealous, proud temper, a strong will, and withal a great desire for approbation. I had never been taught self-control, neither did I understand how religion can be brought to bear upon our daily lives. It was a something outside, distant, unintelligible to me then, associated with going to church once a week, and a few dry, dull books that were given me to read on Sunday. We had the "Lady of the Manor," and "Henry Milner" among our books, but though we devoured the stories, we skipped the grave parts, and liked "Simple Susan" and "Eton Montem," because there were none to skip.



"You would like to be a missionary or a nun, because you admire self-devotion," said my mother. "It is always beautiful, but you see no difference between their devotion and that of 'Quintus Curtius,' or 'Horatius Cocles,' I think. But Mildred, dear, the one is far removed from the other, or ought to be. The one is self-devotion to our fellow-creatures, the other is devotion of our wills to God's will, and this last we may do as bravely, as beautifully every day in the little duties and difficulties of a quiet home life, as in the great world; and more safely to ourselves, because it will attract less attention."

"But how am I to know the will of God? If I could hear a voice saying to me, 'You must do this,' or 'You must not do that,' I feel I could give up my wishes, if they were contrary to His will. But it all seems so misty, so undefined."

"Those who wish to be guided by the will of God are not left without light. There is the Bible, Mildred, and the teaching of the Church, and conscience."

"It all sounds very hard and dry."

"Yes, Mildred, I know what you mean."

But now suppose you loved some one very much, and felt sure that they were good, and had confidence in their wisdom, and knew that they loved you ; would you not try to be with them very much, to learn what they would approve, and to do what pleased them ? And would it not give you pleasure to do so ?”

“ I daresay it would,” I said. “ I don’t know, though, for I never loved anybody very much—excepting James.”

My mother took my hand in hers very gently. “ I have, and I speak from experience.”

“ Then the first thing is to love God very much. But how am I to do that ?”

“ God alone can work that, Mildred ; but where there is an honest desire to know Him, a patient waiting, and a diligent seeking for Him, He will most surely come ; and then will it not help you to think of His glorious works ? the stores of beauty in the spring, summer, and seasons ? the sea, air, and sky ? the ordering of the wonderful systems of stars ? Then man himself, the most wonderful and beautiful creation ? When a soft breeze re-

freshes you, or a bright sun gladdens you, when your heart leaps at the bank of violets, or the singing of birds—remember the beautiful conception, and the thoughtfulness for your happiness are God's."

My stepmother did not know how gladly I drank in her last words. I was such a lover of nature, and yet had never seen it in this light before.

"But," she continued, "the love of God has done more for us than this. He has provided for the deepest wants of our spirits. He sent His blessed Son into the world to be born a man, to live, to die, and rise, and ascend to heaven for us. There is inexpressible love in each stage of this great crowning work of love. He was born a man, that He might have our nature, sympathise with all our weaknesses, failings, joys, and sorrows. He lived, that He might show us how to live, how to raise our lives above the grovelling and self-seeking into which our natural hearts would lead us. He died, to complete that work, to save us from sin and a second death, and thus rob death of its sting. He rose from the dead, to prove

that we can rise from the death of sin, and to give us the hope of everlasting life ; and He ascended, to assure us that we had a powerful and loving Friend in heaven—God and man—and to teach us to ascend thither in heart and life, and to live above the sin, the trouble, the death even, in the hope of a like ascension. Is not this a story of love ?”

We were coming near the town, so my step-mother said no more. I never listened to the sermons in church. They seemed to me like a voice speaking in a language unknown to me, but this sermon interested me. My step-mother seemed to speak out of the fulness of her heart, and the story she told seemed to be one in which she herself had a part. It was “a story of love.”

But we had no more grave talk. We made our purchases most satisfactorily to me. I was delighted beyond bounds at being allowed to choose my own bonnet and dress, and was pleased that my stepmother approved my choice. I remember it was dark, plum-coloured French merino, and the bonnet was black velvet, with plum-coloured ribbons.

the cloak was of shepherd plaid, with a lined cape, as then worn, and trimmed with black velvet. I felt quite a different being when I first put my new clothes on. Truly, coming and well-fitting dresses add not only to our bodily comfort, but to our happiness.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE of Mrs Gwynne's first suggestions was, that James and I should have two small ponies for our own use. So the great carriage horses were dispensed with, and two little roughies, as shaggy as bears, made their appearance in the stable instead. The grand carriage, too, was exchanged for a small light one, that my stepmother could drive herself, and in which the roughies occasionally ran. So, at far less expense, we had much more enjoyment. My stepmother turned us out on the Morfe, I at first with leading strings, and Nathan ; but we soon dismissed both, and were allowed to scamper over the country at our wills, only bidden to avoid the towns.

For a few weeks these rides gave us perfect enjoyment ; but our happiness was somewhat clouded by the decision of my father, that

James was to go to school after Christmas. At first a public school was thought of, but my stepmother seemed to dread this on account of his delicacy, and it was now intended to send him to a clergyman, who took private pupils at Clifftington. I think James was really pleased at the thought of going, only for the dread of leaving me, and the ponies, and the Morfe, and all our old haunts.

It was early in December when my father asked one morning at breakfast, "Why, Emily, when is Rose coming? We must have her here for Christmas!"

"Yes; I hope she will be able to leave my mother next week. I will write and arrange it."

This set my mind busy. I was picturing to myself what Rose would be like, and sometimes longing for her to come, and sometimes fearing lest I should be placed at a disadvantage, by her more amiable qualities.

Among other changes in the arrangements of the house, in consequence of my stepmother's management, was the assignment of two little rooms—opening out of each other—

to Rose and me. Mine was the largest, the prettiest, and most convenient, but in each there was a little bookcase, a writing table, and a French bed. The change was very delightful to me, after the big, dreary "nursery" I had so long shared with Bell. Poor Bell, too, was in good temper ; for my stepmother had given her the office of house-keeper, in which duties she was very useful and happy, while Rebecca made the dresses, and waited on my stepmother and myself. She was clever and neat-fingered, and she succeeded in arranging my loose locks more becomingly and more neatly ; this, with better made boots, and longer dresses, made me really feel more "like other people." Nathan, too, was pensioned off, and a strong able-bodied man, with Nat under him, did the same work, and kept the garden in order ; the flower beds my stepmother took in hand herself.

But with all these changes, there was a great retrenching of expense. Though comfort and cheerfulness had taken the place of dreariness and desolation, still we often saw my father and mother talking seriously together, when my mother looked anxious, and my father

pooh-poohed, but still Simon remained in his place.

But of all the changes, the greatest was in my father—he was another man. Life seemed to have an object for him, and he was cheerful, kindly, and interested in all about him. Occasionally the stern, morose look would come back, but only for a passing moment, and the dungeon was almost deserted.

At last the day came when Rose was expected. James was in a state of great excitement; but I, though I really thought of little else, assumed an air of indifference. It was three days before Christmas, and cold wintry weather. A hard frost had succeeded a heavy fall of snow; but I took my drawing up to a spare room where there was no fire, because the windows looked upon the road by which she would come, and I wanted to have the first sight of her—unobserved. I drew till my hands were blue and numbed, for the roads were heavy, and the coach was late. At last it came in sight; and I climbed on a chair, and wrapped the red window curtain about me, only letting my eyes peer out. It stopped,

and the door was scarcely opened, before a slight, fair girl, rather tall than otherwise, stepped lightly out ; she was muffled up, so that I could not see her face, until she came close under the window, when she threw back her veil, and gave one glance up at the house, so bright and joyous, that it shot like a sun-beam into my gloomy, jealous heart. I darted down-stairs as quick as the thought, and was almost the first to meet her.

“Oh, Mildred,” she said, “I have been longing to see you !”

But I, who should have given the welcome, said nothing. I only kissed her stiffly, and dragged her awkwardly into the drawing-room, where James, who had been tired of watching for her, was sitting. He met her very warmly, and in a moment I saw that they were at home with each other, while I allowed jealousy and selfishness to take possession of my heart, and to build up the barrier anew, which Rose’s loving, unaffected manner had for a moment broken down. I turned away, and began to play with the dog on the hearth-rug ; and when my mother came into the room, before the first greeting allowed

her to notice me, I stole away back to my drawing, frozen deep again in my dungeon of proud, jealous reserve.

My stepmother had too much tact to try to make us friends, though I believe it was her daily prayer that we might be. I must have been very sullen and obstinate to resist Rose's attractive manner, her loving ways, and simple goodness. But the more I felt that she was winning her way to my heart, the more I drew back from her with a kind of determination, to be proof against the power which others found so irresistible. The Maberleys were quite in love with her; she and James were inseparable, and I constantly heard the servants speaking in her praise; and yet she seemed quite unconscious of herself, and only to be thinking how she could give pleasure to others, never studying to win their good opinion for her own sake. It was just a loving, unselfish heart which was her charm.

She was very pretty, but very childlike; that is, in comparison with the girls of sixteen I see now-a-days. She had a delicate complexion, and a pinken colour like a blush

4

rose; soft, silken, flaxen hair; and large, liquid, deep blue eyes, with long dark lashes. James used to call her Gerda, and certainly she was like the picture we had of her; the same earnest, far-seeing look, the same child-like unconsciousness of self. She was very quiet, and never said anything to attract attention, but she had a ready smile and a ready tear too, which I grieve indeed to remember, I so often called to her eye.

I used to say hard things, and to turn away from her loving advances, with a kind of wicked pleasure at the moment; though I was miserable when I had done so, and often went to some solitary place to cry, at the loneliness I had brought on myself.

There were several children's parties that Christmas, to which we went. They were something very new to James and to me. My stepmother had a pretty white muslin dress made for me, with blue trimmings; but I would not show my pleasure, though I felt the improvement to be great, upon Bell's grass-green silk.

At last, holiday time passed away, and James left us to go to school. When I had

a little got over my first fit of weeping, my stepmother called Rose and me into her room, and proposed some lessons.

I had been giving way so long to the spirit of jealousy and discontent, that I suspected everybody of wishing to neglect and depreciate me, and of wanting to lead me in ways by which I did not choose to go. So, when we were called for this purpose, I obeyed sulkily ; and I leant my head upon my hands and looked out at the window, while Mrs Gwynne was looking over my books, and talking over a plan for our daily lessons. I answered shortly any question that was put to me, yawned over the French *dictée* she gave us, scribbled in the intervals, pushed my paper away from me when I had done, and began to strum on the table and hum a tune. I knew I was trying my stepmother's patience, though I avoided looking at her. She was gentle and calm ; but there was a firmness in her manner which made me respect her, and in my heart, fear her. She found many faults in my lesson ; and I made pert, disrespectful answers, such as, "Of course, I knew that," or "That doesn't matter much, it doesn't alter the

sense," and ending with, "I don't see much use in doing that kind of thing." Then scarcely leaving time for the reproof I felt ought to follow, I sprang up and ran out of the room, screaming, "Oh, Lop-ear, Lop-ear, is among the flower-beds."

The second day, I tried the same manner as before, but I found it was not taken in the same way. We were were reading history, and my mother gave us a date. I questioned it, and said I would look afterwards, but I was sure it was wrong. Rose asked the meaning of a word, and I referred to a dictionary, although my stepmother had defined it satisfactorily enough. And when at last she brought out a German grammar, and said she should like me to begin to learn it, I said, "Thank you, I don't care to learn German, it is such ugly, guttural, sounding stuff," and then I opened a story book which lay near, and began to read it.

"Either, Mildred, I am to teach you, and you to obey me ; or not ; which is it to be?" said Mrs Gwynne, in a tone which startled me, and made me look up. "Your father must decide that."

She rose as if to ring the bell, but just then

he entered, and saw at a glance how matters stood.

"If Mildred gives you trouble, Emily, I shall send her to school," he said, "she does not deserve all the patience and forbearance you show, so I beg that if at any time she behaves disrespectfully or unbecomingly, you send her to me."

There was the same look in his face as I had seen, the day when I turned my mother's picture. But now my obstinacy was strengthened, for my pride was touched. To be reproved in that way, and threatened like a child with punishment, and set down, as if I were nobody, and before Rose! I, who should have been mistress of the house but for this "interloper," as Bell said! So I let my father leave the room, and waited till I heard the door of his own den shut, and then, taking up my story-book, I left the room hastily, and ran up-stairs.

Before long, the lunch-bell rang, but I did not go down. I began though, even then, rather to repent of what I had done. I should have to yield in the end, and my dignity would suffer more than if I had submitted at

once ; and then the thought of going to school was perfectly dreadful to me. I was so much afraid of being laughed at ; and I felt sure I should be, among other girls. I was just contemplating going down and quietly taking my place as usual, when I heard a loud laugh which proceeded from the servants, and I heard one of them say, "What, is Miss Mildred in her tantrums again?"

So I changed my mind and rang my bell. Before it was answered, I threw myself upon my bed and took up a book. Rebecca came, and I said haughtily, "Tell Mrs Gwynne I am not well, and wish to have my lunch sent up to me."

It came, but not so my stepmother as I had expected ; and soon after, I heard the carriage come to the door, and saw her drive away without a glance even at my window. I have no doubt she thought I was better left to myself, and concluded that, as my appetite did not fail, my indisposition was not serious. But I was disappointed, and the hours went wearily away, for I could not settle down to anything. Towards evening, the evil spirit seemed to go out from me, and left me spent,

and miserable, and remorseful. I don't think I was penitent. I was only angry with myself, for having lowered my self-respect by bringing on this disgrace. I knelt down, it is true, but my prayer was only a self-willed petition, that my troubles might come to an end. I did not humble myself to acknowledge I had brought them on myself. I sobbed till my head was burning and throbbing with pain. Then I walked up and down the room, wringing my hands, and lamenting my loneliness, which most surely I had to blame myself for. "Nobody loves me, nobody cares for me," I said. "I am not even what I was, to James; Rose has robbed me of his entire affection."

I had sent for some tea, and late in the evening I heard my father and mother return; so I fastened my door, lest either should come to my room, as I wished to put off the humiliation of confessing my fault, as long as I could. Soon I heard the sound of closing doors and shutters, and I knew the servants were going to bed. Rose's room opened out of mine. She generally passed through on her way, and lingered to talk for a few

minutes, and we were not accustomed to shut our communicating door.

But pride was stronger than my desire for love, and as I heard her gentle step approach, I turned the key in both doors. She could enter another way, and she must have heard the keys turn, for she did. But I heard a sigh and a suppressed sob, more than once in her room.

Half an hour afterwards, she knocked gently at my door, and said, "Mildred, dear, may I not come in?" but I made no answer, and soon after her light was put out.

Now began a night I can never forget. I had always had a kind of strange pleasure in the dark, just as I had in extreme cold, when I was fond of wearing thin clothing. I extinguished my candle, drew up my blind, and looked out into the blank open. I could see scarcely an outline, and my room was as dark; and there I sat, glorying in the utter blackness without—a type of my misery within.

Then, I suppose, sprang up in me that desire so natural to all proud minds, awakened to a sense of wrong-doing and sin, a desire to expiate. Yes, I would not again

submit to the humiliation of confessing my faults to another ; I would expiate my sin by voluntary acts of discipline and self-denial. I would spend nights on my knees ; I would fast, as far as I could, without attracting attention ; I would return to my daily duties, do strictly what I was bidden to do, and refrain from impertinent words, speaking only when spoken to ; in fact I would live alone. "Yes," I said to myself, "the life of a recluse is the only safe life. If I could only be a nun ! I have so much power of endurance, and so strong a will, I might in time become a saint. (A saint indeed ! How little I knew myself, and how much less I understood saintliness !) I had lately been reading about the monks of the order of La Trappe, and the idea seized me that I would try to be like them, and avoid the snare of the tongue. I knelt down and said some prayers I had committed to memory : I repeated some psalms, and when I felt sleepy, I walked up and down the room. I opened my window, and leant out of it, that the cold, freezing north wind might rouse me, and when the morning faintly dawned, I took my cold bath, dressed, and at

the usual time went down to breakfast. I was frozen up within, and as cold as the icy fingers with which I met my mother's warm pressure. My father looked sternly at me, but the others behaved much as usual. Only Rose's soft eyes bore traces of tears, and she was more silent than ordinary.

After breakfast my father called me to him, and said, "Mildred, your mother, who is far too forbearing with you, has entreated me to give you one more trial. But if, at the end of six months you do not show a more amiable and submissive temper, you will go to school, and it will depend upon your conduct there, whether you return to this house as your home. I will just tell you, though, that you would find *there* tenfold humiliations, so that you had better master your proud spirit at once. I only wish you would take pattern by the good girl, you are privileged to have for a companion."

The tears which had risen at the first part of my father's reproof, dried up in the hot sockets of my eyes, as jealousy flashed in them at the conclusion. I turned proudly away, saying only, "Very well, papa," and went to

collect my books, for I saw Rose already seated at her lessons in my stepmother's room.


I repeated mine faultlessly, did what I was told with almost impertinent scrupulosity, sat as upright as a post, offering no remark, and showing no life or interest, in what I was about.

Thus I went on ; no one could find a fault with me, actually ; negatively I was even more trying than before. I have seen my stepmother's patient face assume sometimes such a look of pain, that haunts me even now, when I repelled all her gentle advances, with the most frigid replies, and with assumed indifference.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUR months of my life went by, and oh, how wretched I was! all through the spring-time, too, when the willow that hung over the fish pond, flushed with tender green, and when every bush had its secret hidden in it—a round, soft, mossy nest, warm with downy life.

When the celandines sprang up round the roots of the trees, and bees hummed among the sweet allison, and the big, blue-eyed periwinkles stared in their deep and glowing beauty, out from among their dark and shining leaves; I, who loved every bud, and sound, and smell of spring, I still remained unmoved; cold, unloving, and imprisoned, in my own miserable self. I revelled in my loneliness and misery, for there is a certain luxury in self-pity, and I looked upon myself as the



most unhappy of mortals. I used to take lonely walks with only our big dog as a companion, and I often went to a rabbit warren on the Morfe, where a clump of Scotch firs crowned a grassy knoll, and from which I could see the Welsh mountains, and the windings of the Severn among emerald meadows. Here I would sit, and moon, and meditate, or sometimes read, leaving Rose to her own pursuits in solitude. I avoided my mother as much as I could, and took to practising very diligently in the library, in the evenings, to get away from the drawing-room, at the hour when every one has a tendency to warm and unbend. Thus, I imagine, I succeeded in making everybody uncomfortable; a saintly and worthy object to live for, indeed!

I was very wretched, and bemoaned my fate. I know now that no trying circumstances can make a really good person wretched, because they rest in the assurance that God loves them, and will do for them what is best and right; and I know also that most of the unhappiness in this world arises from bad tempers, such as mine, being allowed to have their way. They are called by many names

—proper pride, sensitiveness, high spirit, independence ; but it would be well to trace them all to their common source, and call them at once bad tempers, and people would be more ashamed of them ; and if my story has any moral, it is this, which also its title indicates, “that self is an unlovely and firmly planted idol, which each has to cast down in his own heart.” If we live without maintaining a continual strife against this monster, Self, it will grow so mighty and strong, that it will hold us in miserable bondage, and torture us to our lives’ end. If ever I should marry and have children, as I do not think I shall, my efforts would be, from their earliest babyhood, to make them delight in giving pleasure to others, and thus teach them to begin to fight their tiny battle from their cradles.

It was June. The 28th was my birthday. In old days, Bell used to let us keep it in our own way, and we generally asked permission to take the birthday dinner with us, and to spend the whole day out of doors. Sometimes we lowered our basket of cold chicken and jam puffs to the eagle’s nest, or we pic-

nicked on the island in the middle of the pond. We might have been very happy children but for my ungoverned temper! This year, my stepmother gave me as a present a very pretty silk dress, and I found a lovely bunch of flowers on my bed, with a volume of Wordsworth, from Rose. James used to pass over to me a rabbit, or a kitten, or a singing-bird; but this time he had spent all his pocket-money on a colour-box, a very nice one, and the very thing I wanted. I felt warmed and softened at first, and kissed and thanked them all, and expressed pleasure at my gifts; but after a few hours, the chill came over me, and I felt only a kind of resentment, that I should have to be obliged to people, whom I obstinately refused to love.

My stepmother proposed that I should drive with her to Cliffington, but I made some excuse, though I really should have liked to go very much. So I took my sketch-book and strolled out alone on the Morfe, a victim to my own bad temper.

How far I was then from St Paul's standard of the Christian's temper, "which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,

endureth all things," which "suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked!"

I took with me Faust, our great dog, and though Rose was in the garden attending to the flower-beds, I did not ask her to come with me, as I knew she would gladly have done. James had gone with my mother in my place.

I walked a very long way, I should think at least four miles, that I might reach a boggy part of the Morfe where the asphodel grew. I found a few early blossoms of it, and also of the lovely blue butterwort and the cranberry. I took also a few sketches after my own fashion with a broad quill pen and Indian ink: A group of rabbits on a ferny bank, with fox-gloves and mullein intermixed; a heron among the tall sedges by the river; a field-mouse, nibbling some wild strawberries; a kingfisher by a pond, with dragonflies on the bending rushes; and a thorn, bowing with the weight of a flock of starlings, resting to prepare for another flight.

I came in by the farm-buildings which led

ne by the library window. Rose was sitting here, and I came up so quietly that she did not observe me. I was going to pass on, when I heard something like a sob, and looking in, I saw that she bent forward over her writing-desk, with her face buried in her hands. Her bright, soft hair shone in a slant sunbeam, and her cheek was flushed and wet with tears.

I went up to her slowly and unwillingly ; for, though I felt that I had something to do with her sorrow, I was unmoved. I touched her shoulder, and said almost fretfully, "Rose, what is the matter?" As I said so, I looked at my foot, with which I was beating the carpet impatiently. Rose looked up surprised for a moment, and then she said, "Oh, Mildred, you need not ask me! You know why I am unhappy, I need not tell you?"

"I don't understand you," I said.

"Do not say that," said Rose, "clasping her hands together, and looking up at me with her soft eyes full of tears. "We, who should be as sisters—we, who were both alone and might have been so happy together, are living separate and unlovingly!"

"It is not your fault," I said, "therefore, I don't see why it need make you unhappy."

"Yes, it must be, in part, though I have not meant it. Perhaps I am too childish for you, or perhaps I do not understand you, and have vexed you in some way, quite unintentionally. It is strange," she said, "because I felt so disposed to love you, the first moment we met, and still do love you, if you would let me!"

"Oh, Rose," I said, and I knelt down beside her, "if I had only known that! That is all I want. I feel I should be another person if I thought anybody loved me very much. But how can you? It is impossible after my ill conduct and all that has past! I feel that all your kindness and Mrs Gwynne's is only condescension, or forbearance, or pity; it can not be anything more!" It was my turn to sob now, but Rose comforted me with earnest loving words, and taking my hands in hers, she said, "Then we are sisters from this time, and sisters should not be suspicious of each other, but trust one another, and love one another through everything. Oh, Mildred, let us thank God for this, for I have prayed and longed we might at last be united."

I could not but kneel as she did, and though we neither spoke audibly, and I scarcely did more than heave a sigh of relief, and lift my thoughts to God, we both were soothed by this dedication to Him of our union. When we rose, I put my arm within that of my newly-found sister, and we strolled out of the window, and out yet further upon the common. We neither of us spoke or stopped till we reached a nook that I loved very dearly, and where I had often sat alone. It was where a little spring rose out of a hill-side, and bubbled and gurgled down, in miniature cascades. Round the little fountain itself the hartstongue and polypody grew luxuriantly. The sound of the water, and the glimmer of a sunbeam on the clear ripple, made us both stop, and we chose a bank to sit on, where the pleasant murmur could reach us.

“Oh, Rose, I said, you don’t know how miserable I have always been! I have always been so naughty, and so unlike other people, and nobody has ever cared for me, excepting James.”

Rose looked at me, sorrowfully. “Poor

Mildred, and I have been so happy, till," but she checked herself. "At least, I dare say, many people would pity me, because I have never had the good things which riches bring, but I did not want them. Mamma, grandmamma, and Ewen, were my world, and they loved me as dearly as I loved them, and though we had troubles, somehow I would not have been without them, they seemed to bind us together in some sacred way."

"I don't understand you. I hate trouble, and shrink from it, and you talk almost as if you liked it. I should like to be beautiful, and admired, and clever; to be indulged, courted, and loved; and if I cannot be these, I will be a nun, or a sister of charity. I don't care to be good and meek in a little way."

"I remember once," said Rose, "mamma told me that the people who built the tower of Babel taught us a lesson that we must not try to reach heaven in any other way than the way God appoints."

"I was not thinking about heaven then; but tell me what do you think is the right way?"

"Oh, I cannot teach you, Mildred, dear, and I feel as if I were doing wrong to try."

Only, I think, we must begin by being humble, and ready to be taught, and willing to believe."

"I am afraid I can never do that. I don't like being humbled. I tried once, and it made me miserable."

Rose smiled. "Oh, Mildred, I wish you would talk to mamma about these things ; she could really help you, and teach you. You would be so much happier, indeed you would!"

I said nothing to this, but after a few minutes I said, "Tell me more about your way of being good."

"I don't think we ought to try to be good, so much as to try to do what we know would please God and the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us. I think if we feel deeply in our hearts all He has done for us, we shall be miserable if we do what would grieve Him. I think trying to be good in any other way, seems a kind of selfishness, and that we ought not to be thinking of ourselves, but thinking of Him."

Her manner was so reverent, and the tone of her voice so earnest, that I looked at her with surprise. She evidently had feelings and motives, to which I was a complete

stranger. It was the first time I had ever heard her talk in this way, but I thought now I must have discovered the secret source of all her loveliness, her goodness, and her strength.

"So that is how you are good," I said, "and if I wish to be good in your way, I must just learn about Him, and what He would like me to do."

"And to love Him," said Rose quietly, looking up beyond the trees, and beyond the blue sky, with an expression of such unutterable peace, that I could only watch her and be silent. The great bell soon summoned us home, and we had to hasten to be in time for dinner. We said little by the way, but we held each other's hands as we had never done before.

Dear sister Rose! why did I not cling to you from that day? I have since been often taught by older and wiser people, but I like Rose's lesson best, and cherish it in my heart as a treasure, long indeed neglected, but of which I now know the value.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT night I made a resolve, not such an one as might have been expected, upon finding a loving sister and friend, in my before dreary home ; I made a resolve that I would ask my father to let me go away from that home. I am making others miserable, I said to myself, and I have not the *courage*, (if I had spoken the truth, the *humility*,) to make a sudden change, I will go away for a time, and try to come back different.

So the next morning, after breakfast, I asked my father if I might speak to him. But when I got into his room my words forsook me, and I stood stiff and silent.

“More misdemeanours, Mildred ? Have you forgotten what I said to you four months ago ? You make our home wretched by your discontent and your unamiable temper.”

"I do not wish to stay in it," I said, with an effort.

My father looked round at me with an inquiring glance.

"I cannot be good here. Let me go away for a time—anywhere—to school if you like. Perhaps I shall come back better; I do not wish to make everybody wretched."

My father sat down and leant back in his easy-chair, and a sad look came over his face, as he seemed to be considering what I had said. I longed to go up to him, but something seemed to hold me back.

At last he said, "Well you may go, Mildred; I must talk to your mother about it, and you would do well to talk with her. If only you could break through your reserve you would be much happier."

He spoke feelingly, and I knew it was the truth, but I was too proud to take his advice, so, on the contrary, I studiously avoided my stepmother, and went out into the garden alone. The early morning air always had a magical effect upon me. It was cool and balmy, and the dew hung thick upon every spray; in glistening rows of beads on the

grass, in delicate filigree work upon the gossamer spiders' webs, and in crystal globules on the big cabbage roses. I buried my face in one of these, and felt revived, and then I walked up and down a walk that was little frequented, and——shall I tell what I did? It had always been a failing of mine to give vent to disappointment and sorrow of any kind in verse. I am rather disposed now to think that such a habit encourages an unreal, affected state of mind; though I suppose it diverts the thoughts a little, and so does good. But these lines were the result of my morning's walk, and I give them as I find them in my manuscript book, dated June 29, 1843.

I give them not because of their value, but to show the inconsistent, strange being I then was.

The sun shone clear in the early morn,
The dew-drops hung in rows on the thorn,
The grasshopper chirped in the standing corn.

The blackbird sung in the cherry tree,
The blue-bells bent with the busy bee,
Little May went forth in the dewy lea.

She pulled from the brambles the roses red,
But ere she had twined the crown for her head,
The pinken petals all were shed.

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Then she flung the wreath from her golden hair,
And stopped to gaze at a thorn-bush, where
The diamond dew-drops glistened fair.

She said, "I hate those fading weeds !
With that thorny rose my finger bleeds ;
I will string me a row of those shining beads."

Then she clasped the dewy thorn-bush tight,
And shook it with all her tiny might,
And a shower came down of those jewels bright.

But cold on the child fell those beads of dew,
And she sought them in vain where the rank grass grew,
Only the blue-bells had' caught a few.

Then she turned away, but there glimmered clear,
In the child's blue eye, as bright a tear
As the drops that had shone on the thorn-bush near.

And methinks the hopes of life's early morn
Are like the beads that fell from the thorn,
Before we can seize them, away they are torn.

But while we these fleeting hopes bemoan,
Strange music is heard in our very groan,
And a rainbow-light on our tears is thrown,
Clearer, and brighter, and purer than that, which our
wept-for joys had known.

I was so absorbed in my occupation that I
did not hear my stepmother calling me, or
perceive her until she was quite near me. She
had brought my bonnet, and said, "You are

wrong to be walking in the sun without any protection. It is so hot, dear."

"Is it?" I said; for I had not noticed that the sun had risen high during my meditations. She walked by me till we came to a seat, and then, leading me to it, she said, "Mildred, your father has told me what you wish, and he has been talking to me of sending you to school. I am very unwilling to agree to that, dear child, for I think it is not what you want. But I have another proposal to make to you, and, if you like it, your father, I have no doubt, will give his consent. My mother has asked you to go and stay with her for a time. She is old, and living alone; and she likes the society of young people, and they are generally very happy with her."

I always noticed a strange tenderness in my stepmother's voice, when she spoke of her mother, and it evidently was involuntary.

"Is she really old?" I said, "and has she white hair? Yes, I think I should like to go very much."

"Yes, she has very white hair," she said, "and is as old as you could wish; far past her threescore years and ten."

I had a great veneration for the old, and I always got on better with grown people than with those of my own age. Moreover, I had a dread of school, and this seemed an outlet whereby I might escape it. So I said eagerly,

"Then may I go soon? Cannot I go to-morrow? Cannot Nat take a place for me in the coach?"

"No, we must not be in too great a hurry. There are many things to be arranged. If your father approves, though, you might be ready in a week. Will that be a long trial of your patience, Mildred?"

I felt irritated by the delay, but I said nothing. My stepmother's proposal was so kind, and implied so much confidence in me, that I felt ashamed to say what rose to my lips of impatience and murmuring. But when she had left me to speak to my father, I went back to the house, and acted as if the final arrangements were made. I packed my peculiar treasures, and gave over into Rose's care my rabbits, my magpie, my doves, and Faust; and then I sat down, with my hands before me, wondering how I could wait till Monday for the journey.

It was however decided as I wished, and the next morning Rebecca came to tell me, that my mother was going to pack some of my things in her own room, and wished me to go to her. I thought of my lesson-books, and gathering them up, a dusty, disorderly heap. I ran with them and threw them on the clean white coverlet of my mother's bed. The cloud of dust smothered me, and showed me what I had done. My stepmother only smiled and said, "Oh, Mildred! penitence will not cleanse my quilt. When will you learn,

" 'Rather to spare the bud
Than wash the bespoiled root with fruitless tears—
Rather to check the piercing word
Than wash thy healing balms on self-made wounds?'"

"I shall never learn that lesson," I said, looking down on the dusty marks on my clean muslin dress; "besides, I am not sure that I wish to learn it quite, people are so dull who check their impulses!"

"Very well, Mildred, if regret is enjoyable to you, let your impulses have full fling. But impulse chastened and kept within bounds by a little prudence and consideration for others,

is not less lively than your blind, mad rushes that you think so amusing."

"It's of no use trying to improve me, I'm afraid. I believe I must educate myself, or have some great, heavy troubles to tame me, unless I put chains on myself such as nuns wear."

"Not educate yourself, Mildred, though you may have a share in the work—the share of giving up your will to be brought into subjection in God's great school—life, and the circumstances you are placed in."

The words fell dead on my ear then, but I remembered them years afterwards. And thus, the wise and good may be encouraged when they think they labour in vain. It is often after many days the truth strikes home, that has lain dormant in the heart.

I was little help to my mother in packing. One box I begged to be allowed to do myself, but I had the mortification of seeing it emptied again, for my stepmother came up and caught me in the act of jamming down my desk and paint-box, on the top of frill and tuckers never meant to be crushed.

"There, you see, it's of no use, I can do nothing," I said in disgust.

"Oh, Mildred, how can you say so?" said Rose, as she turned over my drawings which I had brought in to be packed. "Besides, if you tried, I believe you could do anything well, only most things you think are not worth your giving attention to," and Rose laughed.

"Yes," I said, "I think the tortoise must have been a dull, prosy old fellow, and I had almost rather have been the hare."

I thought the next two days very long, though I was more at ease, and happier with my mother and Rose, since our talk on my birthday, than I had ever been before. I was very eager for change, and impatient of delay. I was not to go alone; Rebecca was to go with me, at Mrs Campbell's request, as she would be wanted to walk with me, and to take charge of my clothes, about which I was very helpless.

"Tell me something more about your past life," I said to Rose the last day, as we were walking in the garden, now gay and sweet with flowers. "Something has made you very different to other people. I mean in a good way," I said, as I saw her smile; "not in the way *I* am, in eccentricity and awkwardness."

"There is not much to tell," said Rose, "at least, that I could tell. I have lived with grown-up people very much, since Ewen went away, which is now six years ago! And being alone with mamma, I have known her sorrows and trials, perhaps more than most children would, and that has made me grave and sober. I was a very little girl when papa was taken ill, and he died when I was eleven, and all those years, mamma had many anxieties. The constant nursing of my father, and the care of making a small income meet many expenses; and then, the sad death of the three little ones. They died in scarlet fever, after a very short illness. A year before papa died, poor Ewen went to sea. It had always been his wish, and mamma gave him up so bravely! Poor mamma! And oh, Mildred, we have never heard from him since!"

"I did not know that, Rose," I said humbly, for thoughts rushed through my mind, of the difference between Rose's life and my own. How I had been making my own selfish sorrows, and she had had a burden laid on her, which she bore so sweetly and cheerfully,

for the sake of others; and to these I had been adding.

"And cannot you hear of him in any way?" I asked after a little time. "When Charlie Mabblerley went his last voyage, they were a long time without hearing from him, and Mr Mabblerley wrote somewhere,—to the admiralty, I think, and got news of him."

"Yes," said Rose, "but poor Ewen was not in the navy. He wished it very much, but mamma could not afford it. He went out in a merchant ship, and all we hear in answer to our inquiries is, that he went on shore at Rio Janeiro, or changed into another ship; and once we were told he was dead. But mamma still hopes; she thinks that report was not one to be trusted.

"I thought you said you had had such a happy life!"

"Yes," said Rose, smiling through her tears. "There were never happier children than we were, mamma was so kind, and shared our pleasure, and sheltered us, and gave us so much freedom, and yet was so firm, we never thought of disputing her will. I sometimes think that mamma's great troubles made her

so patient, and good, and hopeful. She was afraid of nothing, because she knew Who was with her, and she bore everything, because she knew Who sent it."

"It must be very nice to live in that way," I said, "but it cannot be possible for all dispositions. I think, though, I can understand now from what you say, what is meant by peace. It used to seem to me an ideal thing, never to be realised."

"Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." "It seems to me there is almost irony in those glorious words," said Rose, "for when did the world give us peace, or indeed anything but unrest, and vanity, and hollowness? I suppose it is because 'The prince of this world hath nothing in me.'"

I felt Rose was far beyond me, and yet she talked childishly, and as if she were only saying out her thoughts. She never seemed to me to preach, or talk religious talk even, but only now and then to tell me some of the things that passed through her mind, every hour of her pure and devoted life.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Rotherham coach passed our door at half-past four every day. I had been ready two hours, and had fidgeted myself into an ill-humour, and others into a state of uneasiness, before it was rumoured that it was in sight. I remember I had on a brown silk dress, and a travelling cloak of the same colour, and that my straw bonnet was trimmed with "Forget-me-not" blue ribbon.

I have often thought since how foolish I was, to be so eager to hurry to a close, this epoch of my life. How happy I might have been with Rose, and my stepmother, and how much I might have learnt from them!

My father was kinder and warmer than usual in his manner to me as we parted, and told me that, like the ugly duck, I should come back to them, to amaze them with my beauty

and improvement. James looked very sad ; I think I had puzzled and grieved him very much of late, when he found that he could not influence me.

We drove for some miles over the common, then along a road with a broad bordering of pasture land, called the Leasowes. There were herds of small black cattle browsing there, who kicked up their heels and frisked their tails as we passed, and scampered away in haste. Then we went through a long plantation of larch, fir, and beech, into which at periods there were entrances by hunting stiles, and where tempting green paths opened, and vistas, and bower-like walks.

It was just twilight when we drove into Rotherham. There was a brimstone coloured band in the west, with pigeon-coloured, flaky clouds in flocks. The little shops were still open in the streets, and the owners lounged about the doors, idly remarking on the fine weather, or the warm evening, to passers-by. The houses were irregular and picturesque, and there was a sweet fragrant smell of flowers proceeding from many a gay little garden. As we stopped, the town-crier took this time

for crying, "A lost heifer," and "A sale at the Leasowes farm," and the coachman sat holding the reins, and the ostlers who had bustled out upon our arrival, stood, bucket and bit in hand, till he had done.

It was Rebecca's native place, and she had espied her father in the little knot of people assembled round the coach.

"A young lady for Mrs Campbell?" said a voice from the crowd. "I say, coachman, have you a young lady from the Morfe, inside?"

I looked out and saw a bustling, very respectable looking, little woman, peering about, and directing her remarks in a shrill voice to everybody in general, as if there was no business in the world but hers, and that that was known to everybody.

"I thought I should have been too late, so I ran off in my apron, and left the milk on the fire. So look sharp with the boxes, Mr Jackson, please. I heard the coach coming up, and I says to missis, 'It can't be Mr Jackson, he's always to his time, and now it's six minutes, good, too soon.' Well, better too soon than too late. Any more boxes in

the boot?—Yes; ‘Miss Gwynne, passenger,’ that’s one.”

This was of course Mrs Campbell’s faithful Sarah, of whom I had so often heard my stepmother speak. So I put myself under her protection, not waiting till the bustle allowed her leisure to look at me, and own me as her property.

“Miss Gwynne—you, miss—I beg your pardon; but I was looking for something little to take hold of—little missie, as Simon used to talk of. For you know Simon is my first cousin’s wife’s uncle, but how should you know? Missis is looking out at the window there; you can see her cap above the geraniums—no, they’re balsams—what am I thinking of? My nephew brought me the seed straight from the Canadas, and I planted them myself in two saucers in the back kitchen window. The sun strikes there very strong, and they came up beautiful. The geraniums died in the frost last winter. William says it killed everything, and he believes it would have got at them if we’d kept them in the oven.”

We had now arrived at the balsams, which

stood in two rows in two bay windows of a cottage-like little house, standing back in the High Street of Rotherham. We had to pass through a very gay little garden, filled with sweet pease, convolvuluses, myrtles, fuchsias, and other humble, but sweet flowers. It was divided into many little beds bordered by thrift, and with walks between, and everything was most faultlessly neat. Sarah lifted the latch, and led me into a little sitting-room, which is to me, even now in memory, the very ideal of real comfort. There were two windows, both of which were open, and boughs of nodding jessamine shook sweet scent into the room. A small fire burnt cheerily, upon which hissed a bright kettle. The table was covered with a dainty white cloth, and handsome, old-fashioned tea-cups and plates, the pattern being of birds and butterflies in blue and gold. A big white cat lay stretched on the rug, at the feet of an old lady seated in an easy chair. And now how can I describe Mrs Campbell? I feel anything I can say will fail to convey an idea of the charm which hung about her. I suppose it was "the beauty of holiness," and "the crown of glory." For her head was truly

“hoary,” her locks silvery as the rime in the early morn, before the sun and the dust of the day has marred it. Her dress of black silk, and her white lace cap were beautifully becoming—but this was nothing. There was that in her that made me pause when I came into her presence, and feel disposed to fall at her feet and ask her blessing. And I felt subdued and changed, in the atmosphere of calm and repose in which I found myself. And, when I thought how unworthy I was of such a place, and how I was, as it were, a serpent in a dove’s nest, I felt confused and ashamed, and sitting down I buried my face in my hands and burst into tears. In a moment Mrs Campbell was by my side. She took my hand in hers, and said, “Dear child, you are most welcome here ; you shall see if an old woman is a very dull companion. At least I will do my best, and you must not be afraid of me ; but let us be friends at once.”

I felt this no hard thing to be ; and Mrs Campbell’s tenderness, and Sarah’s kind, bustling care of me, soon dispelled all clouds, and I began to feel as happy as I had before felt miserable.

Sarah's manner had quite changed in the presence of her mistress. She was most respectful and demure, making curtsies at every word ; expressing the repressed volubility by winks and nods, and sympathising shakes of the head.

I could not help at times feeling like an angel of evil in heaven. The whole atmosphere of the house was so pure, so refined, so peaceful. I was tired, and went to my room early, and there I found everything as pretty and neat as elsewhere. The paper was of faint green, and the little French bed had the whitest dimity curtains possible. A jessamine clustered round the latticed window ; and as I lay still in my bed I heard the twitter of young birds in their nests under the eaves, and the sweep of the wind among the branches, stirring up the scent of the rosemary, and pinks, and wallflowers, which grew under my window.

CHAPTER X.

MY life with Mrs Campbell passed very smoothly on. Her manner seemed to exercise a spell over me, as it did with Sarah; and I never felt tempted to do and say the wild, mad things I had so often done at home. I had lessons in drawing from a master who taught in the clergyman's family; and their German governess read with me every day for an hour. So I spent my mornings with my books, drawings, and music, and in the afternoon I generally went long rambling walks with Rebecca. Occasionally, when the day was very tempting, Mrs Campbell would drive out in her little pony carriage, and I with her.

Oh, what drives those were! The carriage was shabby; William who drove us was shabby; the pony was old and slow; but yet

I can only think of those drives, as among the purest enjoyments of my life. Going gently through the deep lanes, I, in and out to gather wild flowers; returning back with our booty protruding on either side—it might be treasures of crab-blossoms, spindle berries, wreaths of yoryony, or boughs covered with scarlet lichen, as the seasons passed. Mrs Campbell was a great knitter, and we used to take a bag of warm stockings and comforters, to distribute among our poorer friends, for their use when the cold set in.

It was one day early in August—a lovely, glowing summer day—when we took one of these drives. It was hot, but not oppressively so, as the day before we had had rain; and even that day a fresh wind blew from the west, chasing white clouds across a “Nemophila” sky.

“Shall we go a drive, Mildred?” said my dear old friend, “it will be pleasant this evening, and we might go to Sidbrook, and gather the grass of Parnassus.”

I was only too glad to go; and soon the meek pony, the faithful William, and the well-worn little carriage, were at the door. We

drove at first along a turnpike road, overshadowed by trees, fresh and fragrant with the recent rain ; then we went down suddenly into a little valley, where nestled a village. Here we stopped to see several poor friends, gave old Jack a drink of water, and then turned up a lane, such as Shropshire abounds in. It was a red, sandy lane, not pleasant for poor old Jack, I daresay ; but with such banks ! In the spring they were covered with primroses and violets, and canopied with hawthorn ; now the honeysuckle and the wild rose, and the purple cluster vetch, made a sweet and gay border on either side. Woodruff, too, grew in the runlets by the road, and among the rank, green moss on the banks, the slender wood sorrel pierced its crimson stalk, and hung its ivory bell. Thousands, too, of small pansies bejewelled these hedge-rows, as I have never seen elsewhere. They were of purple and yellow, and white, and all varieties of combinations of these, and they made a gay border, and were a source of untold delight to children.

Soon we came to a plantation of birch, beech, and larch, lying on either side of

road. We stopped at a little rough stile, and Mrs Campbell bid me climb it, saying, "Now Mildred, many's the day I have climbed that stile for grass of Parnassus. Go, and we will wait for you here. Follow the wood path till you come to another stile, and then in the meadow to your left are the flowers."

I did. And such a wood path it was. The fir trees smelling so fragrantly, the stock-doves murmuring among them, and the squirrels playing in the boughs! And the flowers! Who that has found these darlings for the first time has not rejoiced as I did? I carried away two beautiful bunches of them, (I always hated that word bouquet, preferring even the old English "posy"), and on my way through the wood I arranged a bordering of fern leaves round them. One of my bunches I gave to Mrs Campbell, the other I carried home myself—I was going to say, almost reverently—and why should I not? for it is a feeling I have when I see anything very beautiful in nature, and I do not think it is wrong.

We drove home a different way, calling as we did at a lodge buried in a beech wood—one of those picturesque and inviting cottages

which I often think I would rather inhabit than the grand house to which they belong. The woman who lived at the lodge had been an old servant of Mrs Campbell's, and she made us come in that we might see her pretty house. While we were sitting in the little parlour admiring the beautiful quilt of small octagon patches the good old woman had made as a present for Mrs Campbell, a dainty little tea was prepared for us ; and I remember to this day how good the hot cakes were, and the honey, and the cream. Then we drove home in "the gloaming," and thus ended one of the happy drives, of which we had many.

We were by no means dull. Mrs Campbell was cheerful, and never set down or discouraged *my* liveliness, but rather seemed to enjoy it. And then Sarah—poor good, faithful Sarah—how many laughs she made for us. She was so strange and eccentric in her ways and manners. And she used to talk like a machine for that purpose—clack, clack, clack, clack—from morning till night, if only there was the cat to listen to her. She never talked so glibly to her mistress ; but if she could only waylay me, she would pour out a volume,

and as for Rebecca she overwhelmed her. Poor Rebecca ; she is now very deaf, and I often laugh and tell her, her deafness must have been produced by Sarah's clacking.

One morning, soon after I arrived at Rotherham, I learnt her history in this way :—I had rung my bell as usual for Rebecca to fasten my dress. Instead, though, of Rebecca came Sarah, bustling and mysterious, saying,—

“A thousand pardons, Missie ; but I took the liberty of sending Rebecca up to the Horse Shoe for the yeast. It's a good step for me, but nothing for young legs like hers. Perhaps you 'll allow me, Miss,” she said, as she wiped her already clean fingers on a delicately clean white apron, “though I shall be bungling, I daresay. For, Miss, I ain't fit for a lady's maid. I've always been used to the kitchen as long as I can remember. Six and twenty years, Miss, I've been with my dear Missis—yes, and to think she should ever come to this, to live in this poor place, with only me to wait on her ! She, as is fit to have all the wealth of the land laid at her feet ! I'm sure, when William came into the kitchen, that day sixteen years come next Good Friday, and

says to me, 'Sarah,' he says, 'she'll have to leave it all, and go and live mean like, in a bit of a place somewhere,' I wouldn't believe it. And I never forgave Mr Leighton, (though he is a nice enough gentleman, I've heard say,) who came when she turned out. Howsomesoever, somebody told William that the garden's never done well since; there's never been a purple cabbage with a heart to it since we left, and the apricots on the coach-house wall, that used to be a sight for bearing, drop off before they're bigger than walnuts. But then, Miss, you wouldn't believe how Missis is respected hereabouts, though she ain't so rich as she might have been. Why, Mr Jackson and Mr Treading, they'd almost fall on their knees, and ask me to let them give Missis the chops and the week's grocery—that is, if I'd let them. But I have to look stern-like, and look sharp after the bills, or they'd leave out half the things, and send more than I pay for."

It was a clean muslin dress, and the hooks were flattened with the iron, but still I thought Sarah very long about the fastening, and she went on, "You don't dress tight, Miss, to be sure, but, as I was saying, when William came

into the kitchen and says that, I says, 'Then I won't leave her. I ain't a parlour-servant, but I know how to keep things comfortable as well, as any, and there ain't many as can make a shilling go farther than I can.' Of course, William took on, because we'd kept company then going on four years, and we were to have been asked in church that Easter, but I said, 'If I ain't worth waiting for, I ain't worth having,' and so he came to after a bit, and bought a bit of ground handy, where he makes his living by growing potatoes and such like for the market, and he comes in and does our bit of work and keeps the garden trim, and has done now this sixteen years. It's a great comfort to Missis to have him about her, and, as I told him, I don't believe Jack would have let another man drive him, and that would have been a pretty business. But what I went through at first no soul alive knows. It was with the eating, Miss, for I was always hearty, and I was not going to eat half a loaf to my breakfast, when Missis had so little coming in. So I didn't, but it was no use, for I got ill, and the doctor told Missis, and she was very angry, I never saw her so

angry before or since. Well, it's still a trial to me, I can tell you, Miss. I've tried everything, cream of tartar, carbonate of soda, and all sorts, but there's nothing I know of like pease-pudding, the first thing in the morning. I generally have one going, and I pop it in the oven the first thing and eat it hot, and I really want next to no breakfast. Oh, it's a first-rate thing for the appetite, Miss!"

"I'll remember, Sarah, if I should be troubled with it," I said laughing, but though I laughed, the tears were in my eyes as I thought of faithful Sarah and patient William, waiting all those sixteen years, and letting their early bright hopes and their youth waste away in loving service to their mistress.

I afterwards found, from Sarah's bidding me never to tell her secret to any living soul, that her mistress had no idea of the sacrifice they were making, and had not, to the day of her death.

Mrs Campbell's bell rang at that moment, or Sarah might have been talking now.

CHAPTER XI.

“OH, Mrs Campbell,” I said one day, as I came in from spending a day at the Rectory, “I think I would almost rather be what I am than be good and commonplace!”

Mrs Campbell put down her book and laughed.

“Why, Mildred, what do you think you are?”

“Naughty, and unlike other people, I know,” I said, “but to live in a square, red-brick house, to have all my childish associations connected with a square, hideous garden, to live a quiet, hum-drum, good-girl life, and to grow old without anything more interesting occurring around me than old Biddy’s rheumatism being better or worse, or Michael Cross

losing his pig! I should be weary of my life."

"My dear child," said Mrs Campbell, "you should value people for what they are, not despise them because they do not come up to your ideal of beauty and cleverness. Which do you think leads the most useful life, you, or Susan Jell?"

"Oh, Susan, of course; that's just what I say. She is tiresomely good, so good that I feel as if I should like her better if she were caught reading a story-book when she ought to be visiting her old women. But she *never* will be."

"It is hard not to be impatient with people who are dull and not clever, dear Mildred, I know. I think the best way is, to admire what is good in them, and to feel humbled by their being better than ourselves."

"But what are the limits of charity? Are we to go on forgiving and forgiving, and forbearing and forbearing to the end? Is there no limit to endurance?"

"Seventy times seven, Mildred, did you ever do that sum?"

"But suppose somebody behaved ill to

you, would it not be right to tell them of it, and to punish them for it, even for their own sake?"

"'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,'" said Mrs Campbell. "If we live from day to day as in God's hands, tracing the good and ill that may come to us as coming direct from Him, we shall never want to take our cause into our own hands, but leave all with Him. But see, are not these your friends, Ellen and Edith Jell?"

"Yes; now I shall feel guilty all the time they are here," and I put my hands to my cheeks, as if to hide their scarlet blushes.

"A proof that it is not well to discuss your friends," said Mrs Campbell, smiling at my discomfort; "but come, there is no great harm done. I don't think those humble-minded girls think themselves either clever or beautiful, and I am also quite sure they would forgive you readily, even if they knew what you had said."

I felt this was true, and it made me the more ashamed of myself; and from this time I did try hard to admire their goodness, and forget their dulness. They had come to bring me some music I had left behind, and were gone again directly, so we resumed our talk.

"I hope I shan't have a dull life," I said.

"Why, isn't this dull?" said Mrs Campbell, pushing up her spectacles, and giving me one of her merry looks.

"I should think not," I said, indignantly. "But really I couldn't stand living with hum-drum people, in an ugly country and in an ugly house, and talking about nothing but other people's affairs day after day. Now, really, without joking, there was nothing talked of to-day at the Rectory, but the death of Michael Cross's pig. It was the first news I heard when I got there, and I listened patiently to all the particulars; but it went on all day. Nothing else was talked of at dinner, and, every now and then, one of the girls would come in with a scrap of new information about it. Emily came from the town with the astounding intelligence that Martha Brown had heard the pig squeak at three o'clock, whereas it was said to have died at two; whereupon the page was sent off in a hurry to ask Michael if he was sure the pig had died at two, and when he came back there was such a chattering, and we had the whole thing over again, and I left them at it. Now wasn't that trying?"

Mrs Campbell had taken off her spectacles, and by the time I came to the end of my story, she was laughing till the tears ran down her cheeks, partly at the story, and partly at my grave way of telling it, as if it were a personal grievance.

“Well, come, Mildred, you never need lead that kind of life unless you like, nor talk very small gossip unless you like. That won’t come upon you like a fate, or fall to you as a duty to fulfil, so you may be easy. But,” and a sad look came over my dear old friend’s face, “though I think people mould in a measure their own lives, I think I have noticed that a certain character, or note, if I may so call it, runs consistently through most people’s lives. The stormy character, the suffering character, the quiet and uneventful, the unsuccessful, or the successful character. At least so it has been with mine, and it ought to bring comfort,” she added, “showing us that God’s design is being carried out, that the whole life is ordered by Him, not this or that important circumstance, or certain periods of our lives only, when we lived more near to Him; but it is not likely you should understand me.”

But I did ; when I thought of my stormy, troubled childhood, with its hours of intense enjoyment ; yes, my life had always been like an April day—hailstones and freezing blasts at one moment ; warm, joyous, laughing sunshine at another. How long would this hour of sunshine last ?

Rotherham was a little, gossiping town as all small towns, I am told, are—everybody knew every other body's business, and it required no little tact not to be drawn into the tittle-tattle which everybody talked. I used often to laugh in agonies—I mean, in agonies lest I should be seen—at the way Mrs Campbell set down and silenced the gossip-mongers ; with all courtesy, but yet so decidedly, that it was a brave person who would repeat a scandal to her.

One day I was sitting with my work at the window. It had been a long, rainy day, and I had been drawing and reading till my head ached, when Mrs Campbell proposed my taking some needlework while she read to me. We were reading "French History." I always loved history, it interested me more than any novel, from the mere charm of truth. Oppo-

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site our house was another, that had long been vacant. It was a gabled, irregularly built house, covered with ivy—such a house as may be seen in most old towns, respectable and dreary.

“Why, the haunted house is taken!” I exclaimed; “there is smoke from the chimneys, and the windows are being opened!”

“Perhaps it’s the ghosts,” said Mrs Campbell.

“No, I think not, for here comes a load of tables more substantial than they would need;” and so, in spite of our contempt for gossip, we watched the arrivals of our new neighbours with great interest.

The next morning early, a chaise stopped, and from it alighted a widow lady, and two tall girls of about fifteen and seventeen; I was delighted, and already counted upon them as friends, and begged of Mrs Campbell to call upon them that very day.

Of course we didn’t, and soon we heard through Mr Jell that Mrs Lester was the widow of an Indian officer, that she had been for some years abroad, and merely came here because she accidentally heard of this house

at a low rent. Mr and Mrs Jell had called, and liked her very much ; but they were especially charmed with her two daughters, Josephine and Emily, who, as they said, were “beautiful and clever.” Mrs Campbell looked at me, and I coloured crimson, and felt as if Mr and Mrs Jell saw what was passing in my mind, or knew what I had said.

But, dear good souls, they did not ; neither would they have cared much if they had.

It was soon after the arrival of Mrs Lester that an inveterate village gossip—a Miss Soames—called on us. She was a well-meaning woman at heart, I verily believe, but so given up to the passion for gossip and scandal, that she seemed not to be able to exist without it. It was really to her like the dram of the drunkard. To get in a store of gossip and retail it, was her daily business ; I suppose it gave her a certain importance in the eyes of some people, which, poor thing, she would not otherwise have had ; and this no doubt is the temptation to many poor lonewomen to become gossip-mongers, and thus they learn to love the occupation, and to exist upon it ! But I am talking very sagely, and letting out the secret

that I did one day grow a little wise, and tame down into an ordinary dull, prosy mortal.

"I always go and have a chat with poor Mrs Campbell," I have heard her say, "poor dear old lady, it cheers her up a little, and then, poor me! you know I am a lonely being, and I am really obliged to stir myself up and go and see my neighbours, or I should get moped to death."

"Moped to death! That is a thing I could never understand, neither can I ever understand being 'cheered up' by hearing gossip about my neighbours," remarked Mrs Campbell when Miss Soames was gone. "To be assured of the friendship of one or two real friends (and who is without these?) would keep a lonely home from being sad to me, even if closer ties were wanting. And then, there is the riches of the presence of the Lord, which, it always seems to me, a lonely woman can keep in remembrance more easily than those called to the duties of a busy, careful life. This alone would make a lonely life peaceful and blessed indeed. Besides, I have my books and my thoughts, and my needlework! Not that I don't like having you with me, my

child. Seeing a young thing about me, and hearing your fresh thoughts and hopes, is very pleasant to me ; but I shouldn't like it, Mildred, if you were a great talker, or thought it necessary to collect news from the village for my amusement. And then, again, to the old, who can do but little, it is very pleasant to be able to be of use, even in a small way, and I must indeed have lived to little good, if at my age I cannot give a few hints, or a little advice, to a young inexperienced thing like you, just setting out on your way through life."

"No one ever did me any good before," I said, reverently kissing my dear old friend's hand, "and I feel altogether different since I came to you. Indeed, I never expected to be so happy as I am now."

The next day, Miss Soames was so full of the arrival of strangers in the village, that she could not resist the pleasure of repeating her scraps of information about them to every one. So she called again on us. Perhaps I had encouraged her by manifesting an interest in her news, which was not usual with me.

"My dear, good morning," she said, as she entered, "I have something to tell you of

your friends. My *dear* Mrs Campbell, now don't rise, I pray, I cannot stay one minute."

A strange look came over Mrs Campbell's face, and she took up her knitting again, knowing what Miss Soames' minutes meant.

"They are French refugees," continued Miss Soames, though what they have fled their country for I can't say of course; I had my information from Mrs Bran, the baker's wife, and she says her boy heard them all jabbering away as fast as possible, and Mrs Scrub, you know her, Mildred, the charwoman, whom I met as I came here, said it was something funny to hear them, they spoke *it* so fast, servant and all."

"Perhaps the '*it*' is German or Dutch, or Maori," said Mrs Campbell quietly from her knitting, "seeing that probably neither Mary Scrub nor Bran's boy know French when they hear it."

"Now, dear Mrs Campbell, you are laughing at me—so satirical, isn't she, Miss Gwynne? No, no; no, no; not quite so bad as that, for I heard one of them myself as I was passing along the street say, 'Josephine, venez je vous prie. Maman, vous attend depuis long-temps.'"

Ah, Mildred smiles. My French is old-fashioned, I know. But what I was going to say is, that it don't look well, and I thought it my duty just to throw out a hint to Mr Bran and Mrs Treading, that those French people seldom have much money, and that it might be as well to look sharp after their bills. Strangers too, and poor Treading has a large family and couldn't afford to lose money. What do you say to it, Mrs Campbell?"

"What do I say to what, Miss Soames?" said the old lady with a quaint smile on her face:

"Don't you agree with me that it doesn't look well?"

"I don't trouble myself about it. But it seems to me you are not acting a kindly part in prejudicing the tradespeople against this poor lady. How do you know your guesses are right, for you can only guess? Their speaking French does not prove they are French people—does it?—or that they have no money?"

"Oh, my dear Mrs Campbell, you are always so hard upon me. I meant no harm. I only say, between you and me, it does not

look well. But, Miss Gwynne, I always tell everybody that Mrs Campbell is an angel. But she has one fault, she has no curiosity."

Mrs Campbell did not put on her angel look then; she looked displeased, as I noticed she always did at anything approaching flattery. So Miss Soames, receiving so little encouragement to remain, went away a little hot and discomfited.

CHAPTER XII.

MY father and my stepmother came over occasionally to see us, and to spend a day, as also did Rose. But I did not feel quite so much at my ease when they came; and though they all urged me to return, I still begged to be allowed to remain with Mrs Campbell, if I was not unwelcome. It was during Rose's visit, that I began to discover the secret of all my bad feelings at home, for the same gnawing discontent and ill-temper took possession of me when I saw Mrs Campbell's attention diverted from me, and when I felt myself somewhat set aside. Every one loved Rose, every one came to see her, and I—I fancied myself neglected. It was nothing more nor less than jealousy which had come between me and happiness at the Morfe, and I felt, if I *returned* home, it would be just the same

again. At least, I had not humility enough or earnestness enough to set myself to work in the only right way to conquer it, so I stayed on. And we called on the Lesters. I was all eagerness and curiosity, and Mrs Campbell did not set me down as she did Miss Soames, for she said, "It was but natural that young people should like their kind, and she should be truly glad if the girls proved to be nice companions for me."

So we knocked at the door. Mrs Bran, from her shop nearly opposite, Mrs Mangel, the lawyer's wife, from her attic window, and about half-a-dozen besides watched us do so, and in half-an-hour, doubtless, it was known through Rotherham that "Mrs Campbell and Miss Gwynne had called on Mrs Lester."


The door was opened by one of those respectable servants, faithful to the fortunes of their master's family, so scarce now, but who are, it always seem to me, so highly to be held in honour. Martha, for so she was called, seemed to be one of the family, and to speak with unfeigned interest of her dear ladies, and they of her with affection. "Our good Martha," as they called her—or our dear

Martha, as might be. She was their only servant, but yet she contrived, as some servants do, to be always dainty and neat even in the midst of her work.

She showed us into a pretty little drawing-room, the oriel window of which overhung the street, and looked straight upon our garden—gay then with white and primrose-coloured hollyhocks, dahlias, and a few lingering annuals. The two girls were sitting by their mother, working as she read, and I perceived they were making dresses for themselves. There was an air of elegance and refinement about the room, though everything was worn, and nothing costly. There was a handsome old pianoforte, and a harp; and books and music lay about the room, which was nevertheless in nice order. A few lovely sprays of jessamine in a glass were on the table; and on a small stand was a common vase, filled with blackberry leaves, just then changing into every imaginable shade of crimson, brown, and gold; it was arranged with great taste, and caught my eye in a moment.

The girls themselves were very simply dressed. Some dark blue prints, I remember,

they wore, but it mattered little how they were dressed, they were so graceful, so lady-like, and so lovely. Josephine, the eldest, was dark and tall, and very handsome; she was evidently the commanding character of the two, for Emily, the younger, was gentle and retiring, and seemed to look up to her sister in everything. She was fairer than Josephine, and had soft gray eyes, and a winning, child-like manner. Mrs Lester was still handsome. She was very lively, and seemed to keep alive her youth for the sake of her children. She told us that her girls were both born in India, that she was left a widow when they were quite young, and as her income was small, she had taken them abroad to educate, as she could do so at less expense than in England. They had only just now returned after ten years' absence, and they found so many changes, so many friends dead or scattered abroad, that they felt very desolate. She was on her way to London from paying a visit at Cliffington, when she passed through Rotherham. Some passenger in the coach pointed out this house to her, and told her it might be had at a very low rent, on account of some



silly report about its being haunted. She had taken rather a fancy to it, and finding the neighbourhood pretty, she had been induced to take it for a little time, till a brother should return from India, who was her girls' guardian, and almost her only near relation.

"Josephine and Emily will be so glad of your grand-daughter as a companion," Mrs Lester ended by saying. "At present they have had no English friends; but we were fortunate, when we were abroad, in falling in with very nice people, both in Germany and France. I fancy Miss Gwynne is about Josephine's age, it will be delightful if they can like each other."

We exchanged glances, and I suppose did like each other, for Josephine moved to a seat near me, and said, "We shall be so glad if you will come and see us sometimes; we go a walk every morning from nine till eleven, perhaps you could come with us then sometimes?"

"And then we read with mamma till two," said Emily, "and after dinner we draw and practise, and in the evening we work and read."

"And our evenings are so very happy, we always long for them to come," said Josephine.

"Mamma reads generally, and we work, though we read to rest her sometimes. But you know we are poor, and we really make our own dresses! See, Josephine made the one she has on, and does not it fit beautifully?" and they both laughed; "but I, I can only help a little."

"Nonsense, Emily, you do as well as I do," said Josephine; "but could we not exchange books, and drawings, and music, it would be so nice for us both? We have many nice foreign books; when you come again you shall see."

Thus ended our first visit, and I was all eagerness to go again the very next day; but Mrs Campbell held me back a little, as she did for some time, saying, "I don't think it ever wise to rush into intimacies—such never last." So she would not let me go once, or twice, or thrice a-day as I fain would, and I know she was wise.

But the Lester girls and myself were, nevertheless, soon fast friends. We walked, drew, practised duets, and sang together. The

singing was a new delight to me, for I had never had any one to sing with. I had been very self-willed about my music as about other things. I began very late, but I believe I really should have played well if I would have learned properly; but I would not submit to rule and drudgery, and now I could play nothing that was difficult to read, but I extemporised and composed after a fashion, and enjoyed, and still enjoy music, I believe, as much as it is possible for any one to do.

We took many long walks, and sometimes when William was at leisure, he would take us out for a drive. We were rather a heavy load for poor Jack. I fancy, though, he liked it, for when we laughed merrily, he used to look round, as if it did his old heart good to hear us, and then we walked up every hill, and a great deal when there was no hill.

Oh, they were happy days! I soon learned to talk French, for my ear was very quick, and we used to astonish poor William with our chatter in "foreign tongues." It was in nutting time, I remember, when the Lester girls had been at Rotherham nearly a year, when Mrs Campbell proposed that we should go

and drink tea at the lodge at Sidford in celebration of Josephine's birthday. Martha went with us, and William drove Jack, and we girls walked and rode by turns.

We were very merry. And the day was perfect—one of those clear sunshiny autumn days, which are, I think, more enjoyable than summer. The beeches by the cottage were all shades of brown; the dog-berry leaves were scarlet; the spindle-berries every shade of tender pink; and the black-berries and nuts hung thick in the hedges. What fun we had gathering the nuts! And what a prize a bunch of three or four or five was to us! Childish enough, to be sure; but still I think we were to be envied by those who are in bondage to propriety, so called. And so we thought.

"I am so glad," said Emily, "that we are not of sufficient importance to be introduced, and to have to go to balls! We should have to spend our time in thinking about our fine clothes, and in paying visits!"

"Yes, I am glad too," said Josephine, "but I like to be well dressed."

"So do I, in good taste, that is, and to have pretty things. I should think all women do.

But what a bore all the rest must be! Now, this kind of thing is much nicer than the theatre or the opera, Josephine.

"We went once or twice at Paris, and the first time we were delighted; but somehow after that we cared for it less. We thought the women were so disagreeable-looking, and painted, and ugly; and we did not like to hear them say the things, or to see them do the things, they did before a crowd without blushing. And then in the morning we used to wake up feverish and discontented, and too late for our nice, fresh, morning walks.

"And we did not feel disposed to say our prayers so well; we fancied, did we, Josephine?—that is, we used to be thinking of the gay scenery; and the dancing and the bewitching music would ring in our ears, when we ought to have been thinking of other things. And everything else seemed dull and stupid. So we told mamma, and she said we should not go any more; and we were so glad, for our own happy home-evenings were much better—with reading, and music, and work."

Josephine walked on a little before us, and spoke to Martha. "And oh, Mildred," said

Emily, "the people used to stare at poor Josephine so rudely at those places. It used to make me quite miserable. We went with our German governess once, and when we told her of it, she only laughed, and said people always did so at those places. But we thought it very disagreeable, and very rude."


So we wandered among the woods till dusk—they, telling stories of their childhood, and I, of mine ; and then, with our treasures in our laps, like children, as we were still, though eighteen, seventeen, and sixteen, we set out homewards, William leading the pony, Martha walking stoutly on before.

Young ladies of the present day have left their childhood far behind them at eighteen, I think, but they are none the happier for it ; and any one might have envied the grace and charms of Josephine Lester.

Thus time passed pleasantly away, and still my home was at Rotherham. I had paid several visits to the Morfe, and each time my mother urged me to return, and make it my home, but I would not. I believe it grieved and disappointed her very much ; but I urged that I was so happy where I was, and that

Mrs Campbell liked to have me, and that I was sure, if I returned to the Morfe, I should be as bad as ever again. So they let me have my own way. James was quite at home, and as happy as possible. He was doing well at school, and was soon to be entered at Oxford. He talked to me, and reasoned with me, about deserting my home ; but I had but one answer —“I made everybody miserable when I was there, and I feel sure I should do the same again if I came back. Why won't you leave me alone, and let me stay at Rotherham, where I am so happy, and where I make no one wretched ?”

There were two sweet baby-girls now in our old nursery—dear little children with Rose's smile, and complexion, and hair. Who would not have loved them? And I did after a fashion ; but a bad feeling arose in my heart, when I saw them in our nursery, playing with our old toys, and our rocking-horse, and saw them fondled at my father's knee, as I never remembered to have been. Rose, too, had become quite necessary to my father. His eyesight had failed very much, and she wrote for him, walked with him, and read to him ;



indeed, he never seemed happy when she was out of his sight. So at each visit that I paid I found my place filled up more and more, and I saw a very happy home, in which I might have been one, but from which I had turned away in pride and temper.

My father was kinder to me than he used to be; but still he seemed colder to me than to James or Rose, at least so I fancied, and I attributed it to his not having forgiven me for my behaviour about my mother's picture.

I felt my conduct was very unfair to my stepmother, as of course to most people it must have appeared as if she had not made my home happy, or had allowed her own children to supplant me; while I knew so well that no one was to blame but myself, and that she was too good and noble to defend herself at my cost.

Once, when I was paying a longer visit than usual at the Morfe, she tried sending Rose away, and she took my place at Rotherham. But the little baby darlings were enough to make me jealous and out of humour, and I was irritated by my father's constantly asking

for Rose, and saying he could not get on without her. If I could have humbled myself, even then, by long patience, I might have worked my way back to my father's heart ; but to humble myself was just what I did not choose to do.

One thing I resolved upon during this visit was to talk it all over with Mrs Campbell, and get her advice. I had been with her now four years, and I had never broached the subject, though of course it was implied that I was not happy at home by my being with her, and I had sometimes fancied that she was grieved and distressed at this. She had once or twice said, in reference to others, "that it was our duty to get on with the people among whom our lot was cast ;" but she had never given, neither had I asked, direct advice as to the conduct I ought to pursue. Perhaps I still "did not want to know what I ought to do."

It was June again, and a lovely summer evening. I had not long returned from the Morfe, and Rose had just left, after paying a visit of six weeks to her grandmother. I came in to tea, very much out of humour, having heard Rose's praises sung wherever I went.

The Lester girls were inconsolable at her going, and Mrs Lester said something about "how dear Mrs Campbell would miss her," which I thought was not flattering to me. Moreover, I had also heard that the Lesters' uncle had come home at last, and that they would therefore leave Rotherham at once. Indeed, they had had an offer to let their house furnished, which they thought of accepting, and in that case they would go to London so soon as the next week.

They were full of joy and excitement ; but I was too selfish to enter into their pleasure as I ought. I could only think of the prospect of loneliness again before me, and weep over the happy days past.

When our tea was over, I threw myself back in my chair, clasped my hands together, and said,—

"Dear, dear Mrs Campbell, did you know all these years what a snake you had been harbouring at your hearth?"

Mrs Campbell looked up from her knitting a little surprised ; but a smile came over her face, and she said, "No, Mildred, I did not. Let me hear all about it."

“Didn’t they tell you how I made every one wretched at home? Didn’t they tell you of the wicked things I did and said, and how cruel I was even to good, gentle Rose?”

“I heard something about a wild, wayward girl, who had had no mother’s care, and who had been left to foolish servants. And I heard that my daughter tried her utmost to win her heart, and to make her happy; but that the child shut herself up against it all.”

“And then you said?”

“And then I said, Send her to me for a while. She wants, may be, long patience, and a warm nest, and may be she will come round.”

“But you did not mean that, when I had found the nest warm, and was comfortable in it, I should refuse to go back to my own home, and to do my duty among my own relations.”

“No, I have sometimes grieved about that, and so has poor Emily; but I said, ‘Have patience; it will all come right in time. God will do His work in the child’s heart, in His own time. Man is too apt to hurry God’s work, or to try to, and thus to mar the bloom of the flower by opening the bud with clumsy fingers. And so I believe it will.’”



"But do you know why I cannot be happy at home, Mrs Campbell?"

"Not exactly, though I can make a guess. But it will do you good to tell me, if you will speak *all* the truth, and call things by their right names."

"I am afraid it is because I am jealous. Jealous of Rose, and of the little ones, and jealous even of James. Jealous that my father did not find *us* enough, but must have sought out others; jealous to see others in our home. I think that is the truth."

"The truth; yes, but is it all?"

"I think so. No, I feel inclined to resent my stepmother's kindness and patience, and Rose's also, because it offers a contrast to— to my ——"

"The right name," suggested Mrs Campbell.

I paused a minute, and then it came out; but with such an effort that I stuck my nails into my hand, and ground my teeth together as I said it. It was trampling upon my pride indeed.

"My bad temper."

"That's right, Mildred, dear; you will be

all the better for honestly acknowledging this to yourself. Now, you have had the courage to call the demon by the right name ; you must pray against it, strive with it, wrestle with it, be not overcome of it."

"But it is too late," I said. "I can never undo what I have done. I feel that each time I go home. I have alienated them all from me, even James."

It was a beautiful evening, and sweet smells came in at our window, for they were making hay close by.

"Let us have our evening walk," said Mrs Campbell, for in fine weather it was our custom to walk up and down the one long walk in our fragrant little garden, at sundown, to watch the glories of its setting.

The dear lady wrapped the soft white shawl about her that she always wore, and took my arm.

"Mildred, my child, all God's dealings with us are to humble us. So the sooner we accept His teaching the better for us. It is not an easy lesson to learn, that of humility, for pride is the devil's stronghold. But the humblest people are the happiest, because they are the

nearest to God. You feel humbled by finding that, when you get to the Morfe, you are no longer amiable or good-tempered. Well, never mind ; rejoice in being humbled. Lay your head in the dust, and pray, and strive, and watch against the pride and evil temper which are your enemies. Here you are out of the way of the kind of temptation to which you are especially open. There is no one to excite your jealousy, and it would be very dull work to quarrel with me." And Mrs Campbell laughed.

"Because you would not quarrel in return?"

"Perhaps so. But, Mildred, I believe you have not yet told all the truth ; I fancy there is another fault against which you must especially watch, or it may bring you and others into great trouble."

I thought for a few minutes, and then I said, "Yes, you are right, I am very impulsive and self-willed. I thought, though, that all went into 'bad temper,'" and the disagreeable epithet again came out with an effort.

"Perhaps they do. But I wanted to see that you knew of these faults, that you might be on your guard against them. Self-will, I

believe," and she spoke somewhat sadly, "is rarely cured but by bitter experience of its consequences, and then it is only kept down—not really subdued."

"But those impulses! I can remember so many times I have done things in a moment of which I never thought before, and which I regretted having done, the very next minute. How am I to guard against these?"

"Mildred, I can only say, there has no temptation overtaken you but that which is common to man. Watch and pray."

It was getting chilly, and Sarah came out with wraps and advised our soon coming in. So we did, and found our little supper of sandwiches and salad ready, and after it we had prayers, sitting near the open window, which let in the moonbeams, and the rustling sound of the evening breeze, as it shook the seringa and acacia blossoms down in showers from the trees.

And then we went to bed. There was a great load taken from my heart by this evening's confession, but yet I had not made up my mind to buckle on my armour, and go in to the battle.

CHAPTER XIII.

I COULD not sleep ; so, very early in the morning, ere the day had fully dawned, I got up and dressed, and went out.

There was a little stream that ran at the end of the garden at the back of the house, which was now low from the heat of the weather. I sprang across it to the opposite bank, which was soft and spongy meadow land. The water-avens, and blue forget-me-nots, and the ragged lychnis grew abundantly there, and the rank leaves of the bog-bean showed where those fair flowers had been. I strolled along, sometimes sinking deep in the boggy earth, and at others finding it necessary to leap broad dykes, where the waters came rushing from the drained meadows. I watched the sun rise, with rose-coloured messengers surrounding it, sent out to herald the coming day. I drank in those

first delicious breezes of the early morning, which can only be enjoyed there. I listened to the larks as they mounted, and to the sedge warblers singing among the pollard willows. The little stream wound fancifully about, and after a time its banks deepened, and it brawled along among stones, or trickled half-hidden among the long grass. I had always had a longing to follow the course of this little brook, for to this day any little meadow streamlet awakens in me an irresistible desire to trace its windings. If one crosses my path, it suggests to me such tufts of meadow-sweet, and willow herb, such tinkling music among bending, listening grass, and rank green moss, such beds, too, of glistening pebbles, with many a tiny waterfall, and miniature strand and island. And this was a very tempting one; and the sun had risen high, and it was warm before I found myself once more at the bottom of the garden, with my feet wet, and my skirts dripping, and my hands fuller than they could clasp of pink bramble roses, of purple cluster vetches, of broom blossoms, and spikes of various orchises; I thought with pleasure of the warm breakfast that awaited me, and went

in through the kitchen to relieve myself of my burden, and of my wet shoes. It was later than our usual breakfast hour, but I was puzzled by seeing everything in the greatest disorder. Last night's candles stood about; the ashes were in the grate, but no signs of a fire, and the shutters were but half-opened. What had happened? I stood still for a moment, and could hear hysterical sobs which proceeded from up-stairs. I went up, and found my way to Mrs Campbell's room. There sat Sarah, both hands on her knees, her apron dripping with tears; her sobs, and groans of agony increasing in violence as I approached. Rebecca stood by her, pale, silent, and agitated. The curtains of the window were drawn aside, and let in a mocking ray of the bright morning sun. A large fire burnt in the room, which had evidently been hastily lighted, and the tables were covered with bottles and glasses. I dared not look at the bed, but when at last Sarah pulled aside the curtain, and in the midst of her sobbing, bid me look there, I saw the face of my dear, dear friend fixed in death.

I could not move or speak; I had never

seen death before, and it is very terrible, let people say what they will. And that this my best friend, whom I had left so lightly the night before, should thus be snatched from me, seemed too dreadful. I scarcely heard what Sarah at last attempted to tell me, "how when she had gone to her mistress's room as usual the first thing, she had thought her sleeping, but was startled by her pale appearance, how she had touched the dear cold hand, and screamed for help, and how Rebecca had fetched the doctor, and how unavailing his efforts had been to bring back the life which had gone out."

I sat for I know not how long, holding the dear, cold hand, longing for tears that would not come. I recalled to mind every little fretful word of mine, and each act of neglect or unkindness which had caused pain to the gentle, patient spirit, to whom I could now make no reparation. How each of these was written in letters of fire on my heart now! How dear, thrice dear, to me were all her sayings and words, each thing she had worn, made, or even touched! Too dear, painfully dear.

I cannot say how long I sat there. I only remember that when I came to myself, I was in bed. I had fainted from exhaustion, and racking pains in my limbs proved to me that I had not sat in my wet clothes with impunity, strong as I believed myself to be.

Soon my mother came into the room. She had been summoned by Sarah, and here was I, I said to myself, again inconvenient and troublesome at a time when I ought to have been a comfort and a help. But I did not express what I felt, but only was a sullen and ungrateful patient, irritated by what seemed to me my misfortunes.

My stepmother nursed me most tenderly and patiently through a long and severe attack of rheumatic fever. It must have been a very trying time to her. She had her recent great sorrow to bear, she was kept away from her duties at home, and she had to nurse an irritable and unamiable patient. I wondered that Rose did not come, but I was told that my father was not well, and that she could not come away from him and the little ones.

At last, I was allowed to be moved, and, late in October, we arrived at the Morfe.

I said good-bye to poor Sarah, who wept at the parting. It delighted me, though, to hear that Mrs Campbell had left her a small sum of money, together with some furniture, and that she and William were at last to be married. They thought of buying a nursery garden, which was to be had at Rotherham, and I afterwards heard they did so, and were flourishing. I was greatly shocked at the change in my father ; he had become quite an old man, and seemed testy and hard to please. I even thought he spoke inarticulately. The two little girls were sweet things of three or four. Alice, the eldest, was like my father and James, grave, and handsome, and dignified ; but little May was very like Rose in feature, and was fair and rosy, and golden haired, merry, loving, and talkative.

Rose took charge of them almost entirely, for I found the establishment much reduced, and there was an appearance of the strictest economy. But still it was a very happy home. My father's irritability was borne so sweetly, that it did not create any wrangling ; and Rose did all she had to do as if it was her delight to do it, and no hard task.

I could not forget my last conversation with Mrs Campbell, and I think I really did try not to make myself disagreeable at home. Indeed, perhaps all would have gone on smoothly, had not my father apparently taken a real dislike to me. He would not let me do anything for him, and he often blamed me harshly, and even unjustly. It was certainly, I thought, a retribution. I had trifled with his affections once, and now I had no place in them. It was humbling indeed, and though I bore it silently and without complaint, I fretted under it, and refused to fit the yoke to my proud shoulders. If I had done so with patience and sweetness of temper, I have no doubt the prejudice would have been removed, for evil *can* be overcome of good, but of nothing else.

I had been at home about three months. It was early in January, and the air was clear and frosty, and the night light with moon and stars. I had come up to bed vexed and unhappy. My father had spoken crossly to me about some books I had taken out of his study, and had forbidden me the room. I had also received that morning a long letter from Josephine

Lester. She said they were enjoying themselves greatly with their uncle. They had been into Scotland, and were now at Scarborough, but they were expecting to go abroad for the winter. Indeed, their uncle talked of living in the south of France, and they would go wherever he went, so there was little chance of my seeing much of the only friends I had ever made, and I was depressed and wretched about it.

I always enjoyed loneliness, and I think I had something of the mole and the bat about me, for I loved the dark. So when I had read and re-read my letter, with many tears, I put out my candle, and drew up my blind to have my nightly meditation by my window.

I looked out. Truly the moon was up, but yet surely that light was stronger than could be caused by a moonbeam! And why were the shadows so clear on the lawn, and why did they shake and tremble in the flickering light? Nay, it was something more, the flickering glare. And what shadow was that that crossed the lawn so quickly, and then was buried among the trees? I knew that broad hat, and that limping gait, but too well. What

could he, Simon, be doing here at this time, for a clock just then struck two? I had been sitting musing over my sorrows so long, that the rest of the family were long since gone to sleep. It was strange!

I opened my door, and went gently along the passage to a window that overlooked the out-houses, and there, what a sight met me! The whole rick-yard was in one fearful blaze. The flames were leaping in the air, and columns of black smoke went up, and I heard the roar and the crackle of the fire, as it burnt the dry timber of which the barns were built, and the fences were made.

I ran to my father's room and awoke him, then to the servants, and then I thought of Rose and the little ones. They were in real danger, for they slept in a wing of the house which had been given up to nurseries and school-rooms, and the roof of which actually joined the burning out-houses. I looked out at a window, and saw it had already caught fire, so I lost not a moment in running to the door which opened upon the passage which led to their rooms, but I was met by such a volume of smoke, that I was obliged to turn back.

I thought for a few minutes, and then I remembered that there was a door in the roof through which James (and I in my Tom-boy days) had often climbed, and paid visits to each several roof and chimney. So I scrambled up, and crawled carefully along the tiles till I came to the burning roof. One corner only was on fire yet, and that the farthest from Rose's room. So I stepped upon the roof, and slipped or crawled down the sloping side, till I was immediately over her window. It was built out into the roof, so that I could get close to it ; I did, and looked in. There knelt Rose, calm and pale, the two little ones clinging to her in alarm. At my voice they turned round, and the next few minutes, though full of anxiety, were, I think, the happiest in my life. It was no easy task to lift the little babies out of the window, and then I had to carry them, one by one, to a safe place, climbing with difficulty the sloping roof. The fire was now so near us that we felt scorched, and the tiles were getting hot ; Rose followed, and in about ten minutes from the first alarm, the whole family were together in safety. I shall never forget the look my mother gave me when

Rose told her how they had been saved. My father and the servants were gone to seek ladders to put against the window, but they could not be got at, as they were kept by the ricks, and had there been a few more minutes' delay, it would have been too late ; so I had really been the means of saving my sisters.

The next thought was for the house. My father had sent our only man-servant on horse back to Clifffington for the engines. A small one had already come from Brude, but it was of little use, for the fire had gained by this time the mastery. The labourers came running in, but there was no one to organise or to order, for my father seemed mazed, and stunned, and they stood about helplessly, only now and then one more ready than the others would make a suggestion or originate a plan. The poor animals had been brought out of their stalls, and stood huddled together on the lawn, and the sounds of their lowing and bleating mingled with the roar of the flames.

I suggested that we should collect all the valuables we could, and place them in the dairy house which stood quite isolated on the opposite side of the house to that on which

the fire had broken out. My mother s with the little ones, while Rose and I, wr in what clothes we could snatch in hast lected the scared maid-servants. Bell v longer with us. My father had procur alms-house for her at Brude, and sh living as comfortably as she could, consi that she had no one to scold. We the backwards and forwards with plate, line anything we could lay hands on. My load was my mother's picture and my fa desk, which I knew contained money ar portant papers. As I ran as fast as I co outstripped Rose, who was more heavily My footsteps, I imagine, were not hear as I came near the dairy-house where dark, I nearly stumbled over some one started sway, and hid himself in the sl But I knew the sound of that limping and called out, "Simon, I know it is When I had said it, I felt a little a for I was alone in this dreary side c house and far away from any help, ha chosen to attack me. But it was but moment I felt thus. I determined I watch the place where he had disappe

and climbing on a gate, I saw the same shadow I had first seen on the lawn slink along by the wall, and disappear through the door by which Simon always entered, and which led towards his own house. I had no kind of doubt now.


One anxious thought I had about my father, for some one said he had gone to Buttermen's house to fetch him, and then a crash, followed by a fresh burst of flames and shrieks from the women, roused me to activity.

It was quite two hours before the engines came. In the meantime, my father had returned with help from Brude, and all was done that could be done to stay the flames. But it was too late. The house was timbered and old, and the dawn of day saw it a mass of ruin.

Before this time Mr Mabberley had come with his carriage, and carried the little ones away to the Rectory, and soon after, we yielded to his persuasion, and went also. But my stepmother would not leave my father, and I did not wonder. He looked so dazed, so shaken, and yet so excited and restless. She

promised, however, she would get him away as soon as the property was secured, and somebody found to leave in charge. I never shall forget the pain and anguish of looking back upon the black pile of smoking ashes, as we drove away in a drizzling rain that wretched morning. The tall Scotch firs were scorched and blackened, and the garden was strewn with cinders, still smouldering, which had been scattered when there was a downfall. I could only bow my head and groan as I saw that all that I loved and associated so tenderly with my childhood had been swept away, as it seemed, at one cruel blow.

Kind Mrs Mabberley did all it was possible to do for us in our miserable plight. She supplied us with clothes, and we found fire and food by no means to be despised after our night of exertion, exposure, and excitement. After having been fed, and warmed and clothed, Mrs Mabberley proposed that we should go to our rooms to rest. The little ones were already sleeping in cots in the nurse's room. I went, for my head was beating with effects of over-exertion and anxiety, and I lay down on my bed. But I had scarcely forgo



realities in one short dream, when I was awoke by Rose entering my room in great agitation.

"Oh, Mildred," she said, "this is worse than all, our father is dying. Poor mamma—do come to her and help her!"

I followed her in a maze, scarcely knowing whether I was still in a dream. But the sight which met me soon aroused me. My father's face had so sad an expression, that I was overcome with fear. At first, I wondered if there had been violence, as I remembered the shadow I had seen haunting the grounds, but the doctor, who soon came, pronounced it to be paralysis. The excitement had evidently brought to a climax what had been ready to manifest itself for some time.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUR anxiety for my father overwhelmed our other trial ; and it was not till night, and he was considered out of danger, that the cause of the misfortunes of the one previous was discussed. I told all I had to tell, and expressed my suspicion that the shadow I had seen was Simon Buttermann's, and that it was he against whom I stumbled on my way to the dairy-house. I then heard, for the first time, that only two days before the fire, Simon Buttermann had been dismissed by my father from his service ; that there had been angry words, and that Simon had been heard to say he would have his revenge. My father had sent constables to his house, to seize him, even while the fire was burning ; but they found it shut up, with only an old woman in it to keep it, who said that the whole family had gone away the day before

to the north of England. From all that could be gathered, it was supposed that they had already sailed for America. There was nothing valuable left in the house, which had been sold some months before, as it afterwards transpired.

By degrees my father recovered his consciousness, but he was but a wreck of what he once had been. He was very helpless, very much depressed, and very exacting, so that my mother and Rose had a hard task to please him ; for me he still seemed to dislike. He seemed also in some way to connect me with the fire disaster, perhaps because I had been the one to give the alarm. On the other hand, my stepmother and Rose were all tenderness and goodness to me. They assured me that if I would only wait patiently, they were convinced the fancy would pass away, and that if I would take my share of attendance upon him, he would soon like to have me with him, and learn to love me. But I could not set myself aside in this way. My pride, my jealous temper, my impatience, rebelled daily, and I looked around for some way of escape from my trying position.

We were to remain at the Mabberleys till some plan for the future could be formed. My mother at last resolved to take a small house at Cliffington, till the state of my father's affairs could be ascertained. From all we knew at present, we had, indeed, reason to dread the investigation.

James and I both inherited a small fortune from our own mother. We had each about two hundred a-year; and, as I was now of age, I received it in my own person. This made me quite independent, if I wished to be so. If I wished it, indeed! Independence is by no means so desirable for a woman, though, I think, as it seems to be. The woman's normal state is dependence; and I think when she aims at the opposite condition, half her charm is gone.

One morning my father had been more trying than ordinary. Rose was not well, and I had taken his paper to him, and offered to read it to him. But he had been angry at her absence, and said "he did not want me, I had never shown any affection for him, and it was too late now to bind up wounds that had been festering so long." I ought to have remem-

bered that sick people, and those who feel their powers failing, should have allowances made for them, and that depression and nervous tension produces irritability, for which they are scarcely responsible. Perhaps if I could have replied gently, and by sweetness of manner won him over to believe in my wish to give him pleasure, and to do right, all would have been well. But I went away angry and injured, and threw myself upon a sofa in the library. There was a religious paper on the table. I took it up to read, and my eye fell on the following advertisement:—

“A clergyman working in a wide mining district, long neglected, is anxious to open a branch school in a distant part of his parish, but has no funds at present to support them. If any lady should be wishing to find a sphere of real usefulness, and would devote herself for a time to the poor, and the children of this neighbourhood, she would be doing a real Christian work.—Communications to be addressed to the Rev. G. S——, Penruthlin, Cornwall.”

Propriety never troubled me. I was scarcely two and twenty, but that mattered little to

me. I would ask no one's permission or advice. I would not even tell them where I was going. I had been patient and submissive all to no purpose. Here was a field of usefulness and I would go to it. So I went up into my room, and chose out the plainest of my dresses and a small supply of linen and necessities and packed them in a box, which I directed to our dressmaker at Clifflington. I gave orders that this should go by the carrier that evening, and then I sat down to mature my plan. I determined to set out early the next morning, and to take a circuitous route, that it might not be traced. I would walk to Clifflington, take the coach, then back to B—— Station, and get across the country into Cornwall. I traced the route out in the map, and took a kind of morbid pleasure in thinking over the difficulties and hardships such a journey would necessarily involve to a young lady travelling alone. As I mused and planned, a ball bounded up against my window, and then sweet childish voices called out, "Sister Milly." It was a challenge from Alice and May for a romp but I turned away from the window, and sat enjoying my grievances, and indulging in

the luxury of self-pity. I had money enough by me to last me for some time, but my chief difficulty was how to draw more, as by means of the banker or lawyer I might be traced. But I had been saving, with the intention of buying a new pianoforte ; and a hundred pounds—which was the sum I had put by—would last me for a long time in the ascetic life I set before me. I sulked, and was silent for the rest of the day ; but at night, when I said “Good night” to Rose, she said,

- “Dear sister, I beg you not to be discouraged. Let patience have its perfect work. If only you will persevere, and not avoid *him*, or keep away from him, or feel angry, dear, I feel so sure all will in time be right. It is only a misunderstanding, dear Mildred ; you are both so reserved, you do not understand each other. It makes us all happier, now you are at home, and the little ones love you, and so do I, so much, you know, Mildred. And do you know I have thought lately that perhaps I may not be here long”—and her voice trembled—“and then you must be a daughter to poor mamma.”

I looked up surprised. I knew she had not been well lately—that she had had a cough,

and had seemed languid and dispirited ; and there was now a sound in her voice, and a gleam in her eye, which, if I had known as I do know now such signs, might have alarmed me.

But, as was my nature, when I had set my mind on a thing, I would not allow anything to keep me back from doing it. I grasped the paper I held in my hand the more tightly ; and kissing Rose several times as an adieu, I said, "Don't talk in that way, Rose ; it's wrong. You are not feeling well, and therefore you are depressed. And as for me, dear, you are blameless, and ever have been, of any share in my troubles." I pressed her hand, and then hurried away, lest by my earnestness of manner I should betray myself in any way.

I awoke early the next morning, before the sun had risen, though a rosy glow among the soft grey clouds in the east told that it was dawn. There was a daily service at seven o'clock, and I sometimes went to it, and I determined to do so this morning. It was early in March, and Ash Wednesday—a fitting day, I thought, for my act of self-devotion. How much of self-devotion there was in it I

am perhaps now better able to judge than then ; so I dressed leisurely, put my room in order, and went down stairs, asking, on my way out, for a cup of milk and a crust of bread, as I had often done before when going to early service. I suppose my nerves were wrought to a high state of excitability, for that service sounded to me as no other ever did. I saw no one in the half darkness of the church, and the voice sounded out as if addressed to me alone, as all the awful denunciations in the Communion Service were, 'it seemed to me, "thundered" out, and sealed by the solemn and dreadful "Amen." Truly, I had not in words cursed my father and mother, but I had been no dutiful child, and "unmerciful" I had delighted to be. My first impulse was to return home, and to strive patiently to undo the work of long years of wilfulness and selfishness ; but my next was more in accordance with my inclination and character. It was to carry out my plan—to cut myself off from every one—to make the rest of my life one long Lent—to live alone, and be forgotten. My mother, and James, and Rose might be distressed about me for a

time; but after the first they would find it really a relief not to have to manage and please so troublesome a girl as I had always been. James, too, had just accepted the offer of a tutorship in Madeira, which might keep him away for some time, and he had left us the day before, after bidding us good-bye. I talked to myself a great deal of nonsense as I tramped through the wet lanes towards Clif-fington. "Yes," I said, "I would go away, and do something devoted and grand, and perhaps die in the deed; or, if not, perhaps, after long years, my friends would hear me spoken of as one who had sacrificed youth, and everything, to do some noble work!"

It was a cold March morning. The lambs in the folds curled themselves up under their mothers' fleeces; the few catkins that had hung themselves out, flattered by the deceitful kisses of a February sun, shivered on the boughs; and the crinkled leaves of the turnips were still rimy with the hoar frost. I walked fast, till I had deposited my letter to the Rev. G. S—— in the village post-office; but it was crumpled and blotted before I reached it, with my determined, and, shall I say it,

guilty grasp. I think it is not too strong an epithet to bestow upon such self-will as mine. It was a long walk, of at least seven miles, and my breakfast had been slight ; but I enjoyed it nevertheless. The air had that indescribable sweetness which only the first hours of the morning possess, and which made me feel fresh, and my step elastic. The hedges were a marvel of beauty, with the fancies of the hoar-frost on the delicately cut hemlock leaves, on those of the downy mullein, and on the webs of the spiders, which were slung from spray to spray. Once or twice I sat on a stile, or a log of timber to rest, and enjoyed the gipsy-like freedom of homelessness and unrestraint. Once, too, as I passed a cottage, a fragrant smell of coffee attracted me, and, as the door was open, I ventured to lay a piece of money on the clean, homely cloth, and ask if I might partake of it. A tidy woman was filling a can with good and hot coffee, which she was sending out to her husband, who was a woodman, and a rosy, demure little woman of seven years, stood waiting to carry it. She was bundled up in mother's warm shawl, and her hands were rosy with the

cold. The good woman gave me a beautiful breakfast of brown bread and butter, coffee, and an egg, and I never enjoyed anything more. I started forward refreshed, and arrived at Cliffton about half an hour before the coach started, in which I determined to begin my journey. I took a fly then to prevent inquiries, and called for my box at the dress-maker's ; then I drove to a small wayside inn, which I knew the coach would pass. I was so well known at Cliffton that I did not wish to be recognised, as I most probably should have been, if I had not contrived in this way.

My plan succeeded very well, and I travelled for some distance—as far, indeed, as the coach would take me, and then I found myself at a small country inn, fifteen miles from the station I wanted to reach. I had thought of sleeping here, and of going on in a chaise the next day, if I were not disposed to walk. I kept my veil down, and tried to put on an authoritative and important manner, to command respect ; but it was anything but pleasant, I found, to be a young lady travelling alone, and dining at the “Tapford Arms.” I

was afraid of venturing into the passages, which were full of waiters, and rough loungers, who did not seem to think it necessary to move out of my way ; and within, the smell of beer and smoke disgusted me ; neither did I care to sit down on the chairs or sofa of my not over-clean room.

It was not yet four. Why should I not go on another stage ? I called a waiter, and asked for a chaise. I thought he laughed impertinently, saying "there wasn't such a thing to be had." "What had they, then ?" I asked.

"You can have a gig, ma'am," was the reply.

So, perched up in a high gig, by the side of a not very agreeable-looking groom, I left the Tapford Arms, feeling a little ashamed of myself and my self-sought adventures. The process of preparing the conveyance had been very long ; and I saw, as we left the yard, that the sun was low, and the shades of evening fast closing in.

In addition to this my vexation, I had not gone far, before I discovered that my driver knew nothing of the road. He turned this

way, and that, and silenced my inquiries by "All right, mum," when I felt quite sure it was not all right. We got into rutty lanes, drove up the bank sides as it got later and darker ; and more than once my bonnet was nearly carried away by the boughs, and the horse was brought up short by a gate, for we could not see a yard before us. At last we stood still. The driver evidently was quite at a loss what to do next, for he could not find his way forward or backward. We had passed one or two cottages, but the wise folk in that country went to bed early, and every light was out. But at a little distance, in this our moment of extremity, we did see a speck of light, evidently proceeding from a window. It was across a field ; and as the driver dismounted, he said, "Don't check the reins, miss," throwing them to me, "he's given to 'skiver.'" What that meant I don't know to this day ; but it was enough to alarm me in my loneliness and helplessness that dark night, though I was used to horses, and ordinarily very fearless. How long I sat neither do I know, but it seemed to me a long, long time. Every bough that crackled with the wind—

every sound, however slight, made me start and tremble. I had always thought myself especially free from fear of darkness, but this night is impressed on my mind as one full of misery, and even horror. I heard once what sounded to me like heavy breathing, and then a low moan, and steps coming towards me. Just at that moment I saw a light coming; and when it came nearer, I saw that a poor cow in the field had caused my alarm. The driver brought another man with him, who told us that we were altogether out of the right road, and at least ten miles from our destination. He said he was sure we couldn't find the road now in the dark, as we must go across country to get back into the right track. So he advised our going along the road for about a mile, when he said we should come to a village where there was "a tidyish public," and there put up for the night. So I silently and humbly submitted to what was inevitable, and was very thankful to find myself at last in the miserable little bed-room, which was the best "the tidyish public" could afford.

My driver, who, I believe, had refreshed himself with supper and ale, when he left me

alone in the lane, was extortionate and uncivil; and what could I do in my loneliness but pay him what he demanded, knowing all the time he had brought me scarcely five miles on my way?

CHAPTER XV.

I HAD had enough of such adventures ; so the next morning early I inquired what means there were of reaching the nearest station. I found a coach passed at ten o'clock, which would bring my luggage, so I set out, after an eight o'clock breakfast, to walk till it overtook me. This was pleasant enough, and I had no more difficulties. I arrived at the station, and proceeded on my journey in an ordinary, matter-of-fact way. But it was quite late in the evening before I reached the little station of Stone, which I had found was the nearest to my destination. So I was again in an awkward plight, for I knew nothing of the people to whom I was going, or the way to go. I was told by the book-keeper it was two miles across the fields to Penruthlin, so I set out to walk, followed by a porter with my

box. There was nothing else to be done. We met a labourer as we came near the village, who directed us to the clergyman's lodgings, and by this time it was quite dark. We had to cross a farm-yard, deep in mud, to pass by snarling dogs, and to brush against sleeping pigs. We knocked at a rough farmhouse door, under which we saw a light, and I awaited anxiously the result. It was opened by a large, uncouth-looking woman, who eyed me suspiciously, and seemed disposed to shut it again. I asked for the clergyman, who lived there.

"Mr Scrivener? Oh, he ain't here, and won't be before to-morrow morning," she replied; and with that she closed the door.

I pushed it, and said, I suppose with some authority, for I was getting desperate, "Wait a minute, I have more to say. You must let me in—you must take me in for the night, or tell me where I am to go. I have come a great distance, and am tired, and a stranger here."

She stared at me again, and said, "Do Mr Scrivener know ye?"

"No," I said; "but—I am come here to

take charge of the school ;” and here my dignity broke down.

“ Oh, a new school missis! We’ve had plenty of ’em—four in the last three months ; but, lor’, there ’s nothing to be done with these folk here about, and nothing to pay with, neither, except out of the master’s pocket, and he hasn’t much to spare.”

So saying, she came out of the house, candle in hand, closing and locking the door behind her, through which I had caught a glimpse of a comfortable fire and an inviting supper. She led the way to a building on the other side of a yard, which proved to be a barn, turned into a school-room ; and passing through it, we came to a rude staircase, and following my hostess meekly up it, I found myself in something between a loft and a garret, in which was a bed, a chair, and a brown ewer of water.

“ He never told me nought about it,” she said, whisking the dust from the chair with her apron, “ and it’s a strange time o’ night for folks to come unbeknownst ;” and then the light happening to fall upon me, the poor woman, I fancy, saw I was somewhat different

to my predecessors ; so she said, apologetically, "It *is* a rough place, to be sure, but stay, I'll make a bit of a fire, and set the sheets to it, and you'll sleep, I reckon, you've come far."

I was so tired and miserable that I did not remonstrate, but sat down on my box, (which had followed me,) without asking for refreshment, or better lodging ; and during the woman's absence I shed a few tears. She returned with wood and sheets, and soon made fire, glancing from time to time at me, as if she thought me mad, and was watching to see if I should do anything extraordinary. I suppose her heart rebuked her, as she left me for the night, with inhospitality to the stranger ; for she turned back, when she had gone half-way down the stairs, and said, "Won't ye talk nothing?"

I said "No," without turning my head, and I heard her say to her husband, who had come peeping and peering at the apparition, "s'pose it's all right. I hope she won't say nothing o' fire."

I had a few biscuits, which I ate, and the

I lay down with my clothes on, and cried myself to sleep.

I had deserved it all ; but the thought that I had, did not make the bitterness of my humiliation the less. And though I had set out with the intention of living a life of self-denial, I was not prepared for such petty annoyances and humiliations as I had met with this day. They required, doubtless, more patience, meekness, and good humour to endure, than the kind of self-imposed severity of life I proposed to myself.

Miserable, hungry, and faint as I felt, I nevertheless slept soundly, and was awoke by the barking of sheep-dogs, and by the bleating and lowing of sheep and cows, mingled with the voices of their drivers. The cows had been milked, and were being sent out into the fields. I dressed, and went to my uncivil hostess, and told her she must supply me with food, and with better lodgings, or tell me where I could find them. I had gained courage with rest, and with the daylight, and this tone answered with my surly friend. She set me a chair by her own fireside, and brought

me a good homely breakfast of bread, and bacon, and milk ; and grumbled out something about "the master'd see about the lodging ; *she'd* nothing to do with it."

When I had breakfasted, I went out into the little garden, which was at the front of the house ; for I found we had stumbled upon the back last night, and therefore perhaps I had made a less imposing impression upon my lady hostess than I should otherwise have done. There were a few daffodils and pinched polyanthus braving the keen east wind, and I walked up and down the straight walk, bordered by them, wondering what "the master" would prove. I dared hardly think of what I had done ; and I had waited a long time, long enough to have lost my courage, and the first fresh strength the new day and the refreshment had given me, when a gig drove up to the door, and a gentleman got out. It was Mr Scrivener, I concluded, as a matter of course, and the question rose to my mind, for the first time, Had he received my letter ?

No, no ; for at that moment I saw Mrs Goff, my rough friend, go out to meet him,

carrying in her hand the very letter I had written. It had then been lying here waiting for him ! I saw him tear it open, and glance at me ; and in a few minutes he came forward, and addressed me with great courtesy, saying, "Miss Gwynne, we are very thankful to you, but you have been rather hasty. Would it not have been better to have conferred with me, and counted the cost ? You will find ours very rough work."

"Oh yes, but I shall not mind it," I said ; "I only want work, and to begin at once. I want so much to do that I shall not have time to think."

I thought Mr Scrivener looked distressed as I said this ; and he said, after we had walked once down the garden in silence—

"You have taken me by surprise. It would have been better to have had mutual references in a case like this. If you are flying away from disappointment, or are only seeking excitement, I cannot encourage you to remain. It seems to me you cannot have given yourself time to think ; besides," he added, "did you come alone ? You are


denial ; and it is out of sight, where there will be none to approve and encourage."

"I shall like it all the better for that," I said ; "but if you want references, you can write to this address ;" and I scribbled on my tablets the name and address of Mrs Lester.

He looked at it, and said, "Mrs Lester ! Strange to say, she is not altogether unknown to me. You will not disapprove of my writing to her ; it is what I should have done in the case of any one—not in yours only."

I liked Mr Scrivener's manner and tone. It was earnest and grave, and yet kindly ; and I felt at once that he was a man I should respect. He was not young, by any means, and I was pleased to hear him speak of his wife.

"Mrs Scrivener," he said, "is in very delicate health, and cannot live here. You see Penruthlin air is not of the purest ;" and he pointed to a column of black smoke, which poured out from a chimney close by. "I have only had this charge two years, and the parish is so large and widely scattered, that I find it very difficult to do my duty by it. Penruthlin itself has a thousand inhabitants ; and, till



lately, there has been no service here. Now, we have one in that school-room, until we can afford a church. I hope to do so in time, but it will be up-hill work, as the few people who are able to give money are at present opposed to us. You will have to go about and collect the children from the streets and the lanes, and you will find them half savages. I have had several paid schoolmistresses, but they gave up in despair; and I came to the conclusion that, as I had such small funds at my disposal, and could not therefore secure any but inferior teachers, I would try no more; and, in a fit of desperation, I wrote the advertisement which met your eye, scarcely however expecting that anything would come of it."


Mr Scrivener then proposed I should walk with him through the village, or rather town. It consisted of long rows of houses, which had been built for the men employed in the mines. They were scarcely to be called streets, as they had sprung up here and there at the convenience of the owners of the mines, without any care for order, or to please the eye. I could see, too, how neglected the people had

been. There was a look of desolation about the place ; and the women and children had an uncivilised appearance, as if they had lived out of sight so long that they shrank from the light. I began at once to take an interest in the work of raising and improving them ; and for a time my uneasy conscience was stilled.

CHAPTER XVI.

✓ OLD Mrs Goff found it convenient to have with civility to me, when I found that Mr Scrivener treated me with respect. This is the way I have found with others besides Mrs Goff; and all I feel when I meet with such deference, is to despise it. I do not care for the friendship or notice of a one who must wait to see if other great people approve of me, or who stand aside till they hear the verdict of others. A little cloth was laid in the parlour for my dinner, and I was asked what I would be pleased to take. Moreover, the eggs and bacon I chose were well cooked.

Mr Scrivener had gone a round of visits, and returned in the afternoon to say he had found some lodgings for me at no great distance. But I pertinaciously insisted upon retain



my old quarters. A few little comforts would, I said, make the loft habitable, and these I would get the next day. There was a small room, too, opening out of the schoolroom, which I would make my sitting-room, and I would train one of my scholars to wait upon me. Finding me determined, Mr Scrivener left me, and drove away in his gig, having given Mrs Goff a charge to do what she could for my comfort. I found then that he only visited Penruthlin three days in the week, as he had a large population at Martinstow, where he lived.

The next day I went there, in the carrier's cart—the only way of going, unless I had walked—and I bought what things were necessary to make me comfortable. I was also introduced to Mrs Scrivener, whom I found a kind, gentle person, but in very ill health. She told me to come to her in any difficulty, and thanked me warmly for devoting myself to the work she was unable to do, but which she longed to see going on.

So I was quite inspirited, and set to work to civilise my little home, which a little carpet, and some curtains, and some books and pic-

tures did much to effect. My next business was to look round for scholars. I was more successful than I expected. I began with four; but each day brought one or two new ones, till at the end of a fortnight I had thirty in regular attendance, with my numbers still increasing. I taught them in my own way. I began by reading to them, talking to them, and singing to them, until I thoroughly interested them. Then by degrees I introduced regular lessons, but even these I illustrated occasionally with stories and pictures, and thus my school became very popular. I had soon as many as I could teach; and out of school hours I made friends with the mothers, or visited the sick.

Mr Scrivener gradually gained confidence in me. He had heard favourably of me from Mrs Lester, who, however, had no idea that I was hiding away from my friends. My personal expenses were so small, that I had money to spend on the parish, and I fitted up and enlarged the schoolroom. Meanwhile, I heard nothing from home.

I was now as I had wished to be, too busy to think, so that any yearnings or longings for

those of my own, if they ever arose in my heart, were not allowed to linger.

I had not been at Penruthlin a year, when I came to the determination that I would devote a part of my little property to building a church. I had to go very carefully to work, lest by this means I should be traced. I employed a lawyer at Plymouth to obtain the money for me, imposing secrecy upon him; and I had paid several visits to Plymouth in consequence. I had set my heart on the first stone being laid on All Saints' Day, and it was, and I was honoured and lauded by many; but somehow I had not the pleasure in the fulfilment of my wish that I had anticipated.

It was about three months after—in February—when we had some of those lovely, bright days that often occur at that season, when I arranged to take six of my best behaved school girls with me for a day's pleasure to Plymouth. It was a three hours' journey, and we started early. I took with me a young woman in whom I had confidence, to help me in the charge, that I might be at liberty to do any business I might wish to do; so I sent them to the beach, and to see the beauties of

the place, while I went into the town. I went to the library, and, while waiting for a book, my eye fell on a visitors' list which lay on the table, and caught the name of Sir W. and Lady Willoughby. I had not seen my sister for years, and had hardly heard anything of her since her marriage; but, somehow, now, a longing came over me to speak to one of my own kin, and I left the shop, determined to seek her out. They were at the Eagle Hotel, only a few steps from where I was, and in a few minutes I found myself face to face with a smart waiter, inquiring for Lady Willoughby. He left me while he went to see if she were at home, and returned to me with a cynical smile, (so I thought at least,) saying her ladyship was particularly engaged, and could not see me. I felt very angry, as I had sent my name up, so I tore a leaf from my pocket-book, and wrote, "Your sister, Mildred Gwynne, waits below to see you." This time the waiter returned, and bid me follow him, but I was only shown upstairs, and a chair placed for me in a passage, with the understanding that Lady Willoughby would see me when she was disengaged. I waited at least

ten minutes, each moment growing more wroth, when my sister came leisurely out of the drawing-room, and approached me coldly, and with a look of annoyance.

"Who would have thought of your being here?" she said, kissing me half in the air, as if wishing to avoid the ceremony; "and why, Mildred, what an old-fashioned, solemn young woman you have grown! Is it the stepmother's doings?"

"Nothing that's bad in me is the stepmother's doings," I said, "but, Madeline, I thought you would be so glad to see me. I was overjoyed to see your name as being here."

"Hush!" she said, "don't speak so loud;" and she drew me away from the drawing-room door, "here, come in here," and opening another door at a little distance, she drew me evidently into her bed-room.

"What in the name of goodness are you doing here?" she said, throwing herself back in a very easy chair, while she motioned to me to take any I could find. "And what has happened to you all? I have not heard from anybody excepting from my father, and he

seemed to say you were all gone to ruin, as far as I could make out."

My sister's manner was so cool, and she betrayed so much annoyance and impatience at my visit, that I grew hotter every moment, and was silent only to prevent myself from saying something very angry.

"You know if you want me to help you, I really ——"

At this I could refrain no longer. I said, proudly, "You quite mistake me, Madeline. If I needed it, I would take no help from you, neither will I trouble you longer with my presence, which seems to be so annoying to you."

"Hush!" she said again, "Sir William will hear you."

"And who is Sir William that I should be afraid of him, or that you should be ashamed to introduce your sister to him? No, Madeline. It was a great mistake to separate us, I feel, and therefore, perhaps, the consequences are not your own fault entirely; but I pity you, because I see you are a slave to appearances, and to worldly nonsense, and have no place in your heart for those of your own blood."

I was going away without any further greeting, when she said, "I see you are just what you used to be. I remember you bit a piece out of my new wax doll once when I had offended you, and another time you painted my pink silk dress with a brush dipped in treacle. No wonder I am afraid of you. But good-bye; I am very sorry I cannot ask you in to luncheon. You must come some other day when I am alone. We could talk over old days then, Mildred, and the old people."

"No, thank you," I said, "I shall not be in your way. I leave Plymouth in a few hours." And so, with a cold good-bye, and another pretended kiss, Madeline left me, returning herself into the drawing-room, as if greatly relieved to have got rid of me.

I had often been very miserable, but I think I never felt quite so miserable as I did as I left the hotel that day. The contumely of the proud is hard enough to bear, but till you have learnt to value it at its true worth, the bad feelings it arouses in your own heart is the worst part of it. I felt for the moment I hated Madeline, and I am afraid I did. But

I returned to my school children, and did my best to forget her, though it was not easy, and it all came back again when, as we were walking towards the station to go home, a handsome carriage passed us, and Lady Willoughby in it, who did not care to see me. A gentleman was by her side ; whether it was her husband or not, I could not tell.

I returned home very moody and wretched, in that state when tears seem to be ready to overflow, and the heart to wince at a word. I went to my little room, and found tea prepared by my little twelve-year-old maiden, and on the table what to me was a very rare sight—a letter. I had only one now and then from Josephine, or one occasionally on business, but this had a home-like, familiar look, which made me start. I took it up and recognised my stepmother's writing. My heart beat fast, and I think it was with joy. I began to feel weary of my wilful loneliness, and to sigh for those who loved me. I opened it and read :—

“MY DEAR MILDRED,—We have at last traced you. James returned from Madeira a

few weeks ago, and in London met with Mrs Lester, who told him that you were in Cornwall, working hard amongst the poor in a mining district. But why should you have hidden from us, Mildred, and have given us so much needless pain, and caused us such cruel anxiety? We should not have prevented your carrying out your intentions, if your heart was set on such a task. But I write now to tell you, in case you still have any affection for us, that my poor child Rose is on a sick-bed, from which she will only be removed to the grave. Indeed, ere this reaches you, she may have left us for our Father's house. God bless you, Mildred. He knows I would have been a mother to you, and that if I failed, it was not from want of will.—Your affectionate stepmother,

“EMILY ROSE GWYNNE.”

For the first time for those long eighteen months I wept. I had become such a piece of machinery, and had kept myself so incessantly busy, that I had no time for such sentimentality. I am inclined to think that though an idle or idling life is demoralising, that an over

busy life has its snares too. It is not necessarily injurious—indeed, it is very healthful and strengthening, if only we are on the watch, that we do not become well wound-up clocks, and nothing more. It is well for one leading a very busy life to have a half hour in the day for quiet thought and meditation. No one should be too busy for that, but I was then. And if I had sat down for it, I could not have enjoyed it. A thousand fears, plans, possible evils would have risen up in my mind like phantoms, and chased the peace away. Of course, it is not to the many one would say it, but there are some few to whom I now, in my sage old maidenhood would say, “Beware of being too busy.”

Yes, I wept and mused over the happy past and the sad past, and forgot all my engagements, and the memoranda that lay on my table, of things to be done that evening. “No,” at last I said to myself; “Rose must not die till I have asked and received her forgiveness; till I have thanked her for trying to soften my hard heart; thanked her for the fragrance of her holy life, and for her loving example.” I wrote a note in haste to Mr

Scrivener, and asked for a holiday, telling him that there was illness in my family. So the next day I was on my way to Cliffington. Then came back to me the words of Mrs Campbell, the last night we walked together, when she said, "Self-will, I believe, is rarely cured but by bitter experience of its consequences."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE journey, when made by a commonplace railway route, was not very formidable; and, as the day drew to a close, I found myself at Cliffington. I placed myself in a fly, giving the address in my mother's letter, "4 Summer's Row." It did not sound very grand; but I was scarcely prepared for the tiny, shabby little house at which we stopped. It was one of a row, with a small garden before it, with green outside shutters to the windows, and was next door to a dressmaker's. It was, too, in an unfashionable part of Cliffington—a part, indeed, which I had scarcely known to exist. I knocked tremblingly at the little door, which had a small, stiff brass knocker, and it was opened quickly by Rebecca, whose pale, placid face flushed with *pleasure* and surprise when she saw me. But

she spoke in whispers. "Miss Rose," she said, "was so very, very ill. Her poor mistress was with her. They expected the poor young lady would not have lived through that day, but she was sleeping now, and must on no account be disturbed."

So I stole into the little sitting-room, which was very near the front door. I sat down on the first chair, and sobbed out the first truly penitent words in prayer I had ever uttered. In the midst of my weeping the door was pushed open, and my father came in with a candle in his hand. At first he did not know me, and was going to retire again with a polite bow, when I took his hand, and said, "Father, don't you know me? I am Mildred."

"Oh, Mildred, to be sure. Well, I am glad you are come, though it is too late, too late; the poor child is dying. If you had been here it might not have been so. She had too much to do; and that rogue Buttermann — but never mind, we won't talk about him. Thank God you are come; your poor mother has need of some one. God is good. He would not take both from us."

Just then my mother came in. She had

heard the sounds of my arrival, as she could not fail to do in that tiny house, and she came to welcome me. She pressed my hand warmly in both of hers, and then kissed me with earnestness, her eyes overflowing with tenderness. She then led me by the hand silently to Rose's room, but she stopped outside the door, and said, "Can you bear it?" I bowed my head, and we entered.

There lay my sweet sister, whose love I had flung from me, whose gentle spirit I had so wantonly wounded, in the last gasp of death. She was supported by pillows, and was breathing with difficulty, and the short, dry cough was frequent and distressing, and all the sad symptoms of consumption were there.

She smiled as I came in, and made a sign that I should come near. Then she took my hand in her own long, thin, transparent fingers, and pressed it warmly. James was kneeling by the bed, and I knelt too, and we both joined together in the last commendation of the soul to God. We had thought she was insensible, but as we repeated the last part of the prayer, which is for the surviving, she pressed my hand more earnestly, and a smile

came over her face—a smile expressing such purity and peace, that we felt as if in the presence of an angel.

And so we were ; for one gasping breath, which seemed more like a reaching after something to be desired and within view, than a struggle to retain that which was passing away, and our sister had left us.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

IT is some years since I wrote the first part of my story. For a long time I could not look over what I had written, my heart was so sore for our dear Rose's sake, remembering how unworthily I had behaved towards her. I did not return to Penruthlin ; indeed, when I told all to Mr Scrivener, he said I must not go back, and I did not wish it. I heard from James that when our father's affairs were investigated, it was found that there was literally nothing left, so successfully had Buttermann carried out his dishonest plans. All my parents had to live on, therefore, was my stepmother's very small fortune, and what James could spare. And when Rose found that my father could not have the comforts he was accustomed to, she had insisted upon going out as a daily governess ; and it

was the exposure to weather, and over-exertion, which had hastened, if not caused her illness and death. When she became too ill to work, they had had to remove into this poor little house, rather than spend more than they could honestly afford.

James was anxious to finish his terms at Oxford, that he might begin to work for himself, and I had only half of my little fortune left. So I saw something must be done; and hearing that old Mrs Campbell's cottage at Rotherham was to be let, I proposed that we should take that, as we could live at less expense in a quiet village. I was influenced, too, by receiving a very kind letter from Mrs Jell, who wrote to ask me if I would teach her younger children, who were now without a governess. So I have been bowing my head to the yoke, and learning that there is something better than mere cleverness and beauty, for I have truly learnt what goodness is from kind Mr and Mrs Jell. And I have some other pupils, too, so I have enough to do; but our home is pretty, and comfortable, and happy, and our evenings are as pleasant as they were in old Mrs Campbell's time. And

my father takes great delight in the little garden, which is wondrous gay ; and my step-mother teaches the little ones, and goes among the poor, to whom the very name of her mother is dear.

Those who look upon prosperity as necessary to happiness will not understand me perhaps, when I say that I never was so happy in my life, and that I think few people are happier than I now am.

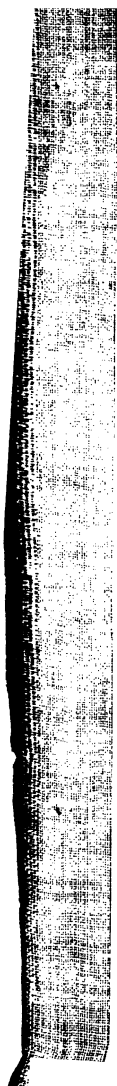
My father, it is true, at first shrank from me as before, but I waited, as poor Rose had advised, and by degrees I became necessary to him, and now he leans on my arm, and looks to me for every loving service he needs.

Yes, it *is* easier to learn to labour than to learn to wait ; but it is the choicest maxim that wisdom has to teach, to say nothing of its being the first-fruit of Christian faith.

“Therefore should every man wait, should bide his time ; not in listless idleness, not in useless pastime, not in querulous dejection but in constant, steady, cheerful endeavour : always willing, and fulfilling, and accomplishing his task, that, when the occasion comes he may be equal to the occasion.”

James has just been ordained, and will be curate to Mr Jell for the present, so we shall have him with us ; and my patient, saintly mother ! she, forgiving me as I did not deserve, has taken me to her heart as a daughter, and never by look or word has she reproached me for the past. I can see now my errors ; and because I believe they are not peculiar to myself, I have told my story, that any who choose may learn by it ; for I would fain save them from learning from cruel Experience who brands her lessons on the heart in burning letters, and writes them with fire.

THE END.



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